



# Violence at work:

Findings from the 2008/09  
British Crime Survey

Paul Buckley, Heather Cookson and Claire  
Packham

## Contents

	<b>Page</b>
Summary .....	3
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	5
Chapter 2 The extent of violence at work.....	7
Trends in violence at work .....	8
Who is at risk of violence at work? .....	9
Repeat Victimisation .....	11
Influence of alcohol and drugs .....	11
Offender-victim relationship .....	12
Chapter 3 The consequences of violence at work .....	14
Physical injury .....	14
Appendix A Additional tables .....	15
Appendix B Occupational groups.....	18
References .....	19

## Summary

This report presents findings from the 2008/09 British Crime Survey (BCS) on violence at work. It provides an overview of the extent of violence at work in England and Wales and examines the nature of these incidents and the risk factors that may affect victimisation.

### The extent of violence at work

- The risk of being a victim of actual or threatened violence at work is low; the 2008/09 BCS indicates that 1.4 per cent of working adults were the victims of one or more violent incidents at work.
- Approximately 327,000 workers had experienced at least one incident of violence at work in the 2008/09 BCS, 45 per cent fewer than the peak of 592,000 in 1997.
- There was an estimated 627,000 incidents of violence at work according to the 2008/09 BCS, comprising 321,000 assaults and 305,000 threats.
- The number of incidents of violence at work has fallen by 55 per cent from the peak of 1,404,000 in 1995 to the current level.
- Respondents in the protective service occupations, for example police officers, were most at risk of violence at work, with 9.0 per cent having experienced one or more incidents of actual or threatened violence while working during the year prior to their interview. Others at risk included health professionals, at 3.8 per cent, and health and social welfare associate professionals, with 2.6 per cent. Science and technology professionals, and workers in textiles, printing and other skilled trades were least at risk.

### The nature of violence at work

- The 2008/09 BCS found that 1.3 per cent of women and 1.5 per cent of men were victims of violence at work once or more during the year prior to their interview. The highest risk age groups were 25-34 and 35-44 for men (1.8 and 2.0 per cent respectively) and 35-44, and 55-64 for women (1.5 per cent).
- It is estimated that over a third (36%) of all people assaulted or threatened at work were repeat victims, with almost a quarter (24%) experiencing three or more incidents of workplace violence during the year, and a further 12% having experienced two incidents.
- Strangers were the offenders in 59% of cases of workplace violence. Among incidents where the offender was known, the offenders were most likely to be clients or a member of the public known through work.

- Victims of actual or threatened violence at work said that the offender was under the influence of alcohol in 36% of incidents, and that the offender was under the influence of drugs in 18% of incidents.

### **Consequences of violence at work**

- The 2008/09 BCS found 47% of assaults at work resulted in injury, with minor bruising and scratching accounting for the majority of the injury type recorded.

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is publishing this report as part of its responsibility for developing and implementing policy on work-related violence. HSE has published a wide range of guidance on the prevention and management of work-related violence, and works in partnership with others (including the Home Office, other government departments, employers, trades unions and local authorities), to raise awareness of the issue and share good practice.

Employers have a legal duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. In addition, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 place specific requirements on employers to assess the risks to their employees, and to take appropriate measures to prevent or reduce the risks. These legal duties include protecting employees from exposure to reasonably foreseeable violence at work - both physical attacks and verbal abuse.

In order to develop strategies to reduce the risk of violence at work, the extent and nature of such violence need to be understood. This report updates previous data published in Budd (1999), Budd (2001), Upson (2004), and Webster et al. (2008). This report is based on findings from 2007/08 and 2008/09 BCS interviews.

### **Definition of violence at work**

The British Crime Survey (BCS) measures respondents' experiences of crime-related incidents and classifies these into offence types (including physical assaults and threats), and also collects detailed information about the nature of the victimisation. The BCS defines violence at work on the basis of type of offence (assaults or threats); what the victim was doing at the time of the incident (at work or working); and the relationship between victim and offender (domestic violence is excluded).

- Physical assaults include assault with minor injury, assault without injury, wounding and robbery; threats include verbal threats made to or against the respondent. The term violence is used in this report to refer to both assaults and threats. However, threats are not usually included in other BCS measures of violence.
- Respondents were asked what they were doing at the time the incident happened – included here are those incidents where the respondent said they were at work or working, including working at home.
- Excluded are incidents in which there was a domestic relationship between the offender and victim (current or former partners, relatives or household members) as these cases are likely to be very different in nature from other experiences of violence at work.

Where stated, analysis is based on respondents of working age in employment. This includes women aged 16 - 59 years and men aged 16 - 64 years who said they were in paid work in the last seven days (either as an employee or self-employed).

### **Structure of the report**

- Chapter 2 reports on the extent of violence at work in England and Wales from 2007/08 and 2008/09 BCS interviews and investigates how the level of violence at work has changed over the last two decades. It also considers the relationship between the victim and offender and whether the offender was under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Chapter 3 addresses the consequences of violence at work in terms of injuries experienced by victims.

### **The British Crime Survey (BCS)**

The BCS is a large, nationally representative, household survey that has been carried out since 1982. The main purpose of the survey is to measure the extent and nature of criminal victimisation against adults, aged 16 or over, living in private households in England and Wales. Respondents are also asked about their attitudes towards different crime-related issues.

The BCS has run continuously since 2001 with each annual dataset reporting on interviews conducted between April and March, covering incidents experienced by respondents in the 12 months prior to their interview. BMRB Social Research carries out the fieldwork for the BCS, which has a sample of around 47,000 respondents. Further details are contained in the BCS Technical Report (<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/bcs0809tech1.pdf>).

Further information on the British Crime Survey and access to recent publications can be found at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/bcs1.html>.

## Chapter 2 The extent of violence at work

In order to aid the development of policies to reduce violence at work it is necessary to assess how frequently incidents occur and the risk of victimisation. This chapter looks at the level of violence at work in England and Wales and examines how this has changed over the last two decades. Two main measures of the extent of violence at work are presented – the number of victims and the number of incidents. The variation in risk of victimisation among different groups within the population is also examined.

### The level of violence at work

The estimated risk of a worker being a victim of an assault or threat of violence at work in a given year is quite low. The 2008/09 BCS estimated that 1.4 per cent of working adults were the victim of one or more violent incidents at work in the year before their interview; 0.7 per cent had been physically assaulted while they were working and 0.8 per cent had been threatened. This represents an estimated 327,000 workers who had experienced at least one incident of violence at work, 168,000 had been assaulted while they were working and 176,000 had been threatened (Figure 2.1). Note that the overall victimisation risk does not equal the sum of the risks of assaults and threats as some victims will have experienced both assaults and threats within the previous year.

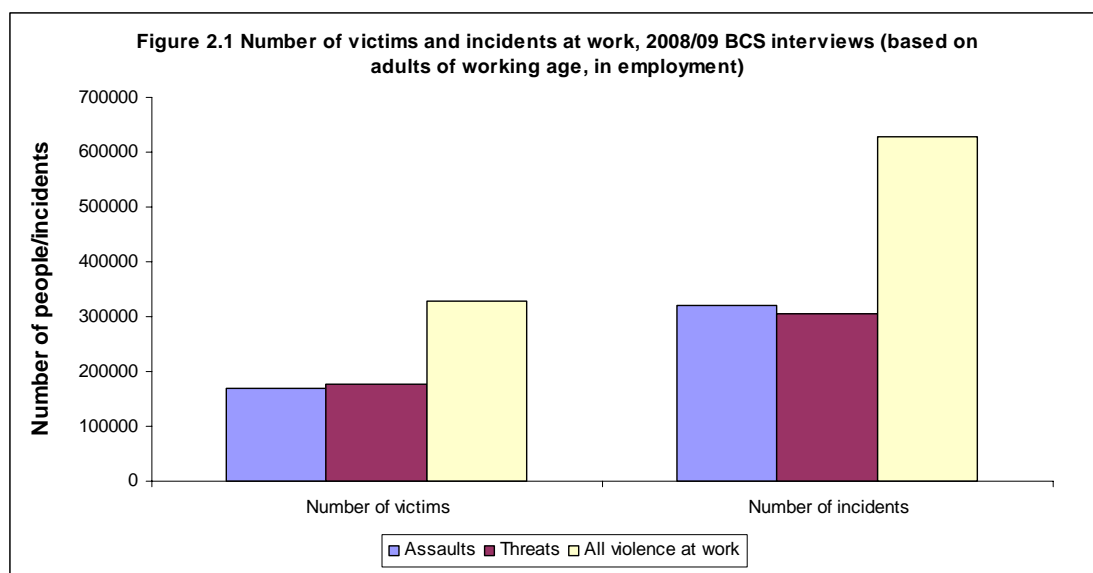


Figure 2.1 also shows the number of incidents of violence at work in the 2008/09 BCS. It is estimated that there were 627,000 incidents of violence at work in England and Wales, of which 321,000 were assaults and 305,000 were threats. The number of incidents is greater than the number of victims: a victim can experience more than one assault or threat in the year. These estimates are subject to sampling error and may differ from the true number of incidents and victims in England and Wales (for more information see Section 8 in Volume 2 of *Crime in England and Wales 2008/09*).

## Trends in violence at work

The trend in the number of victims of workplace violence since 1991 is shown in Table 2.2. Note that the figures differ from those published in previous BCS reports<sup>1</sup>.

Between 1991 and 1997, the estimated number of workers who had been a victim of violence at work rose by almost 44 per cent, from 440,000 to 592,000. The number of workers who had been a victim of assaults rose by a quarter (25%) over this period while the number who had been a victim of threats increased by two fifths (41%). The total number of victims does not equal the sum of the number of victims of assaults and threats as some victims will have experienced both offence types in a year.

Since 1997 the number of victims of violence at work has fallen by 45 per cent to 327,000.

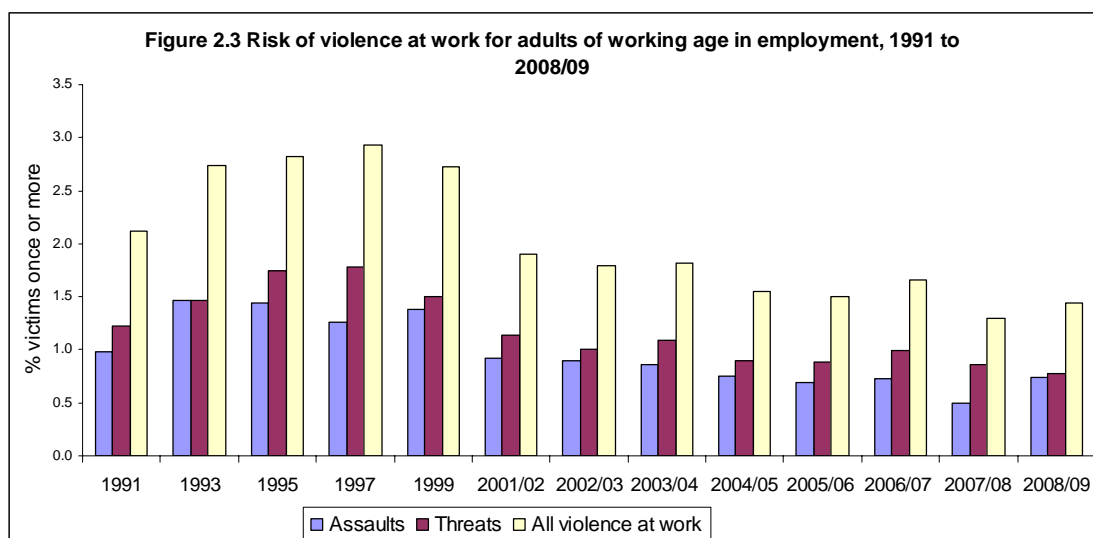
**Table 2.2 Number of victims of violence at work for adults of working age in employment, 1991 to 2008/09 (2001/02-2008/09 interviews)**

Number (thousands)													BCS
	1991	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Assaults	204	277	279	255	288	206	203	195	164	154	156	112	168
Threats	254	277	338	359	315	255	228	247	198	194	211	194	176
<b>All violence at work</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>407</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>327</b>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	4,959	6,953	7,984	7,408	10,121	16,324	18,369	19,131	22,521	24,475	23,974	24,030	23,258

1. The number of victims is calculated by multiplying the prevalence rates by the number of adults of working age in paid employment within the population.

<sup>1</sup> Figures have been revised to exclude snatch theft from the violence offence category and to only exclude incidents of domestic violence that may take place at work.

Figure 2.3 shows the trend in the prevalence of workplace violence, that is, the percentage of workers who were victims of violence at work once or more during the year, since 1991 (see also Table 1.01 in Appendix A). Between 1991 and 1995 the number of incidents of violence at work rose by 53 per cent, from 919,000 to 1,404,000 incidents. Following the peak in 1995, the number of incidents showed an overall downward trend, falling to 627,000 in the 2008/09 BCS (see Table 1.02 in Appendix A). The risk of victimisation, that is the percentage of workers that have experienced workplace violence once or more, has remained fairly stable since 2001/02 (Figure 2.3)<sup>2</sup>.

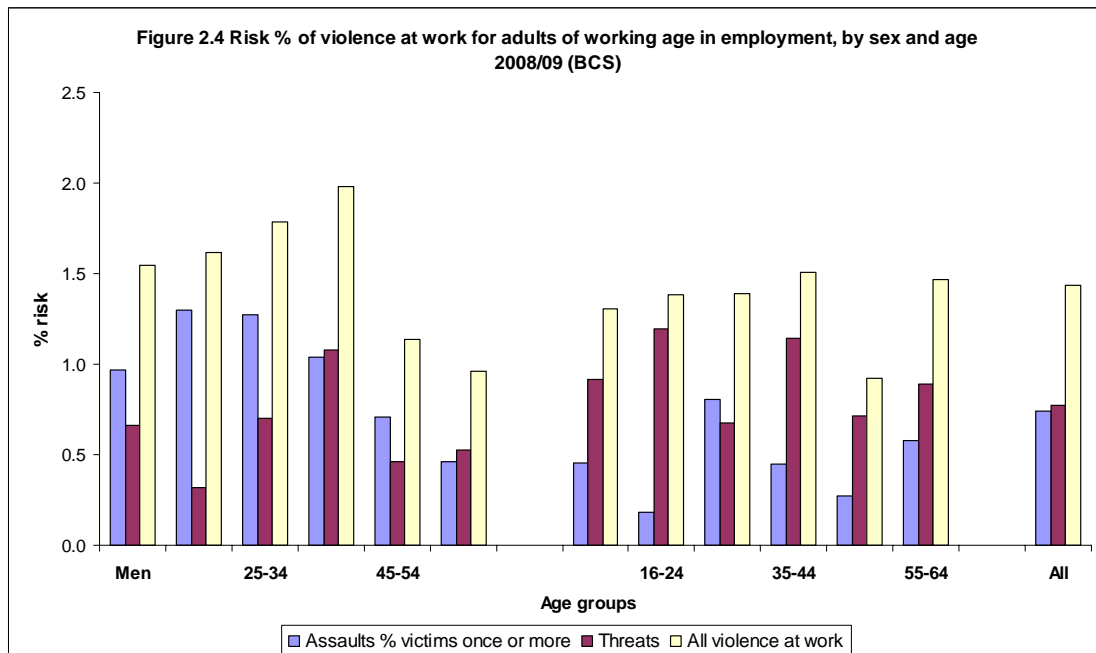


## Who is at risk of violence at work?

### Age and sex

Looking at who is at risk of violence at work, that is, the proportion of workers who were victims of violence at work once or more during the year, the 2008/09 BCS shows that 1.3 per cent of women and 1.5 per cent of men were victims. With regard to age, for men the highest risk age groups are 25-34 and 35-44; 1.8 per cent and 2.0 per cent of men in these age groups have been victims. For women, the age groups with the highest estimate for risk are 35-44 and 55-64; 1.5 per cent of women in these age groups have been victims. See Table 1.03 in Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> The number of victims of workplace violence is estimated by multiplying the risk of being a victim by the population estimate for adults of working age in employment from the Labour Force Survey; 2007/08 BCS used 2007 estimates (April - June quarter), 2008/09 BCS used LFS 2008 estimates (April - June quarter).



## Occupation

National level estimates of violence at work mask variation in risk among workers with different occupational characteristics. Previous research has shown that not all workers share the same risk of violence at work (Mayhew *et al.*, 1989, Jones *et al.*, 1997, Budd, 1999 and 2001, Upson, 2004, Webster *et al.*, 2008).

The BCS assigns a Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code to the current occupation of all respondents, or if they were not in work in the week prior to the interview, their last main job (ONS, 2000). The individual SOC codes can be grouped into categories to allow analysis of occupational differences in risk. The analysis in this publication uses the 25 sub-major occupational groups; full details of the SOC occupations within each of these groups are given in Appendix B (for further details of the SOC classification, see ONS, 2000).

Only respondents who were working in the week prior to their interview are included in the analyses presented in this chapter. Respondents may not have been in employment for the entire 12 months over which the risks are measured, however the BCS does not ask respondents how long they had been in their current job. The inclusion of people who had not worked throughout the year may lead to an underestimation of the level of risk. Furthermore some respondents may have changed jobs during the year; the violent incident may have occurred in a previous occupation, details of which are not collected. It is not possible to identify these cases. However, the overall impact is likely to be small, particularly as many people who change jobs will remain in the same occupational group.

**Table 2.5 Risk of violence at work for adults of working age in employment – highest risk occupations only, 2008/09 BCS**

<b>Percentages</b>	<b>Assaults</b>	<b>Threats</b>	<b>All violence at work</b>
Health professionals	0.4	3.4	3.8
Health and social welfare associate professionals	1.0	1.8	2.6
Protective service occupations	8.4	1.2	9.0
<b>All</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.4</b>

The BCS shows that there is large variation in the risks of violence at work across occupational groups (Table 1.04 in Appendix A). People in protective service occupations, for example police officers, fire service officers and prison service officers, had the highest estimated risk, 9.0 per cent having experienced one or more incidents of actual or threatened violence while working during the year prior to their interview. Full details of the occupations included in each of the occupational groups are given in Appendix B.

Table 2.5 lists the occupational groups most at risk of assaults or threats at work. Overall, respondents in protective service occupations (such as police officers) faced the highest risk of assaults while working, at 8.4 per cent – 14 times the average risk. The percentage experiencing threats is lower (1.2%), which could be partially due to the fact that potentially violent situations may be more likely to result in actual assaults for workers in the police and prison service because they are dealing with known offenders who may be more likely to resort to physical violence.

Other groups with high risk of assaults included health professionals (3.8%) and health and social care (2.6%) occupations.

## **Repeat Victimization**

Some victims of violence at work experienced more than one incident during the year before interview. The BCS counts the number of times each individual has experienced an offence over the 12-month period (up to a maximum of six separate offences) and so can provide estimates of the level of repeat victimisation. The 2008/09 BCS estimated that over a third (36%) of all people assaulted or threatened at work were repeat victims, with almost a quarter (24%) experiencing three or more incidents of workplace violence during the year, and a further 12% having experienced two incidents.

## **Influence of alcohol and drugs**

The BCS asks victims of crime whether they thought the offender(s) were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the incident. The BCS can only provide an indication of the role of alcohol or drugs in offences, as a relatively high proportion of respondents are not able to make this judgement, particularly for drugs. Also, those that are able to provide information are likely to be basing their response on their perceptions of the offender's behaviour, rather than on evidence of alcohol or drug use. This may lead to an overestimation of the proportion of incidents involving offenders who were under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Victims of actual or threatened violence at work said that the offender was under the influence of alcohol in 36% of incidents, and that the offender was under the influence of drugs in 18% of incidents (Table 2.6). Alcohol was more often named as a factor by victims of assaults at work than by victims of threats at work.

**Table 2.6 Offender under the influence of alcohol or drugs<sup>1</sup> in violent incidents at work for adults of working age in employment, 2008/09 BCS**

<b>Percentages</b>	Assaults	Threats	<b>All violence at work</b>
<b>Under the influence of alcohol</b>			
Yes	43	29	36
No	55	59	57
Don't know	3	12	7
<b>Under the influence of drugs</b>			
Yes	23	13	18
No	57	59	58
Don't know	20	28	24
<i>Unweighted base</i>	196	236	432

1. Questions asked only if the victim was able to say something about the offender(s), and if there was more than one offender, victims were asked if any of the offenders were perceived to be under the influence. Questions were not asked if any offender(s) were perceived to be under school age.

## **Offender-victim relationship**

The majority of violent incidents that occurred while the victim was working involved offenders who the victim did not know before the incident. Strangers, that is people the victim had never seen or spoken to before, were the offenders in 59% of cases of workplace violence. Among incidents where the offender was known, the offenders were most likely to be clients or a member of the public known through work – they were mentioned in 16% of assaults at work and 22% of threats (Table 2.7).

**Table 2.7 Offender under the influence of alcohol or drugs<sup>1</sup> in violent incidents at work for adults of working age in employment, 2008/09 BCS**

<b>Percentages</b>			
	Assaults	Threats	All violence at work
<b>Stranger</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Known</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>41</b>
Workmate/colleague	8	8	8
Client/member of public through work	16	22	19
Young people from local area	2	8	5
Other known <sup>2</sup>	9	6	7
<i>Unweighted base</i>	200	228	428

1. The relationship to the offender(s) is classified as: 'stranger' if the victim did not have any information about the offender(s), or did not know and had never seen the offender(s) before; 'known' if at least one offender falls into 'known by sight or to speak to' or 'known well' categories (for multiple offenders this takes priority over any less well-known offenders).

2. 'Other known' includes friends/acquaintances, neighbours and tradesman/builder/contractor.

## Chapter 3 The consequences of violence at work

Experiencing violence at work can have both physical and emotional consequences for victims and worry about workplace violence may impact upon people's health. This chapter examines the physical injuries caused during incidents of workplace violence.

### Physical injury

**Table 2.8 Injuries sustained in violent incidents at work for adults of working age in employment, 2008/09 BCS**

Nearly half (47%) of assaults resulted in injury with minor bruising and scratching accounting for the majority of the injury type recorded.

<b>Percentages</b>	<b>Assaults</b>
<b>No injury</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Injury</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Type of injury<sup>1</sup></b>	
Minor bruising or black eye	35
Severe bruising	11
Scratches	19
Cuts	14
Other injuries <sup>2</sup>	6
<b><i>Unweighted base</i></b>	<b><i>201</i></b>

1. Figures may add to more than 100 as more than one type of physical injury may have been sustained.

2. 'Other' includes broken bones, broken nose, broken, lost or chipped teeth, concussion or loss of consciousness, facial or head injuries or other injuries.

## Appendix A Additional tables

**Table 1.01 Risk of violence at work for adults of working age in employment, 1991 to 2008/09 BCS**

<b>Percentages</b>	<b>BCS</b>												
<i>% victims once or more</i>	1991	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001/02 interviews	2002/03 interviews	2003/04 interviews	2004/05 interviews	2005/06 interviews	2006/07 interviews	2007/08 interviews	2008/09 interviews
Assaults	1.0	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.4	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.7
Threats	1.2	1.5	1.7	1.8	1.5	1.1	1.0	1.1	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.8
<b>All violence at work</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.4</b>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	4,959	6,953	7,984	7,408	10,121	16,324	18,369	19,131	22,521	24,475	23,974	24,030	23,258

**Table 1.02 Number of incidents of violence at work for adults of working age in employment, 1991 to 2008/09 BCS**

<b>Numbers (thousands)</b>	<b>BCS</b>												
	1991	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001/02 interviews	2002/03 interviews	2003/04 interviews	2004/05 interviews	2005/06 interviews	2006/07 interviews	2007/08 interviews	2008/09 interviews
Assaults	434	602	676	496	642	366	443	350	320	331	288	204	321
Threats	485	573	728	640	621	451	451	437	369	379	397	352	305
<b>All violence at work</b>	<b>919</b>	<b>1,175</b>	<b>1,404</b>	<b>1,135</b>	<b>1,262</b>	<b>818</b>	<b>894</b>	<b>787</b>	<b>690</b>	<b>710</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>556</b>	<b>627</b>
<i>Unweighted base</i>	4,959	6,953	7,984	7,408	10,121	16,324	18,369	19,131	22,521	24,475	23,974	24,030	23,258

1. The number of incidents is calculated by multiplying the incidence rates by the number of adults of working age in paid employment within the population.

**Table 1.03 Risk of violence at work for adults of working age in employment, by sex and age**

Percentages				2008/09 BCS
	Assaults	Threats	All violence at work	Unweighted base
<i>% victims once or more</i>				
<b>Men</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>12,116</b>
16-24	1.3	0.3	1.6	1,033
25-34	1.3	0.7	1.8	2,439
35-44	1.0	1.1	2.0	3,470
45-54	0.7	0.5	1.1	2,967
55-64	0.5	0.5	1.0	2,207
<b>Women</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>11,142</b>
16-24	0.2	1.2	1.4	1,105
25-34	0.8	0.7	1.4	2,444
35-44	0.4	1.1	1.5	3,366
45-54	0.3	0.7	0.9	2,919
55-64	0.6	0.9	1.5	1,308
<b>All</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>23,258</b>

**Table 1.04 Risk of violence at work for adults of working age in employment, by occupation, 2008/09 BCS**

Percentages				BCS
	Assaults	Threats	All violence at work	Unweighted base
<b>Managers and Senior Officials</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>7,876</b>
Corporate managers	0.5	1.2	1.7	5,628
Managers and proprietors in agriculture and services	0.9	1.9	2.6	2,248
<b>Professional Occupations</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>5,548</b>
Science and technology professionals	0.1	0.1	0.2	1,385
Health professionals	0.4	3.4	3.8	459
Teaching and research professionals	0.6	0.6	1.2	2,429
Business and public service professionals	0.5	1.0	1.3	1,275
<b>Associate Professionals and Technical Occupations</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>6,960</b>
Science and technology associate professionals	0.0	0.4	0.4	793
Health and social welfare associate professionals	1.0	1.8	2.6	1,991
Protective service occupations	8.4	1.2	9.0	614
Culture, media and sports occupations	0.1	0.8	0.9	987
Business and public service associate professionals	0.4	0.7	1.0	2,575
<b>Administrative and Secretarial Occupations</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>5,652</b>
Administrative occupations	0.2	0.4	0.6	4,472
Secretarial and related occupations	0.1	0.6	0.7	1,180
<b>Skilled Trades Occupations</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>5,575</b>
Skilled agricultural trades	0.8	0.1	0.8	539
Skilled metal and electrical trades	0.2	0.1	0.3	2,118

Skilled construction and building trades	0.5	0.3	0.8	2,009
Textiles, printing and other skilled trades	0.0	0.1	0.1	909
<b>Personal Service Occupations</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>3,797</b>
Caring personal service occupations	0.6	0.7	1.2	2,923
Leisure and other personal service occupations	0.7	0.7	1.4	874
<b>Sales and Customer Service Occupations</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>3,266</b>
Sales occupations	0.5	1.0	1.3	2,629
Customer service occupations	0.7	0.5	1.3	637
<b>Process, Plant and Machine Operatives</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>3,785</b>
Process, plant and machine operatives	0.6	0.2	0.8	1,859
Transport and mobile machine drivers and operatives	1.2	1.3	2.4	1,926
<b>Elementary Occupations</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>4,697</b>
Elementary trades, plant and storage-related occupations	0.4	0.5	0.9	1,371
Elementary administration and service occupations	0.9	1.0	1.8	3,326
<b>All</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>47,156</b>

## **Appendix B Occupational groups**

The occupational classification used in this report is based on the ONS Standard Occupational Classification 2000 (ONS, 2000). The 2000 SOC classification consists of more than 350 occupational codes, which can be categorised into groups based on nature of the work performed and the level of skill required. The analysis in this publication uses the 25 sub-major occupational groups; listed below are the SOC codes that comprise each group. For full details of the 2000 SOC classification see the ONS Standard Occupational Classification (ONS, 2000).

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/classifications/current/SOC2000/>

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