



Trends in community violence in England and Wales 2005–2009



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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Injury records from Emergency Departments (EDs) have been studied over the last decade as part of the work of the National Violence Surveillance Network (NVSN) and provide information about local, regional and national violence levels and trends in England and Wales. The purpose of the current study is to evaluate overall, gender, age-specific and regional trends in community violence in England and Wales from an ED perspective from January 2005 to December 2009.

Methods: Violence-related injury data were collected prospectively in a stratified sample of 77 EDs (Types 1, 3 and 4) in the nine Government Office Regions in England and in Wales. All 77 EDs were recruited on the basis that they had implemented and continued to comply with the provisions of the 1998 Data Protection Act and Caldicott guidance. Attendance date, age and gender of patients who reported injury in violence were identified using assault-related attendance codes, specified at the local level. Time series statistical methods were used to detect both regional and national trends.

Results: In total 221,673 (163,384 males: 74%) violence-related attendances were identified. Overall estimated annual injury rate was 6.5 per 1000 resident population (males 9.8 and females 3.4 per 1000). Violence affecting males and females decreased significantly in England and Wales over the 5-year period, with an overall estimated annual decrease of 3% (95% CI: 1.8–4.1%, $p < 0.05$). Attendances decreased significantly for both genders across four out of the five age groups studied. Attendances were found to be highest during the months of May and July and lowest in February. Substantial differences in violence-related ED attendances were identified at the regional level.

Conclusions: From this ED perspective overall violence in England and Wales decreased over the period 2005–2009 but increased in East Midlands, London and South West regions. Since 2006, overall trends according to Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), police and ED measures were similar, though CSEW and ED measures reflect far greater numbers of violent incidents than police data. Causes of decreases in violence in regions need to be identified and shared with regions where violence increased.

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Introduction

In the UK the Coalition Government has prioritised the collection and use of Emergency Department (ED) derived information for violence prevention purposes [1]. Endorsed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and previous publications by the National Violence Surveillance Network (NVSN), this harm based measure has been shown to be a reliable and objective measure that is less prone to reporting and recording biases than police measures and has, through routine collection and analysis, led to substantial and significant reductions in violence-related hospital admissions [2–4].

Although levels and trends in violence in England and Wales have traditionally been measured using the two official Home Office sources of data, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW: formerly the British Crime Survey, BCS) and police records, official statistics have often been contradictory. For example, the number of BCS violent incidents resulting in injury in 2009/2010 revealed a 29% decrease compared with the same figure in 2001 and police recorded incidents of violence against the person and its subcategory, violence against the person with injury (which includes all assault with minor injury and incidents of wounding), increased over the first half of the decade (between 2002 and 2005). However, by 2009/2010 both violence against the person and violence against the person with injury recorded by the police had fallen by 18% and 27% respectively [5].

In addition to the official publications, injury records from EDs have been studied over the last decade as part of the work of

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the NVSN and provide information about local, regional and national violence levels and trends in England and Wales. The network has shown injury data to be a robust and alternative source of information on levels and trends in violence and has brought clarity to national trends by triangulating measurement. According to NVSN there were significant decreases in violence for both males and females and for all age groups studied between 1st January 2000 and 31st December 2004 (decreases of 20% in Wales and 13% in England) [6]. However, despite these decreases, the rate of violence was found to differ greatly among economic regions, with higher rates identified in the Northern regions. Regional inequalities in health and prosperity are well documented in England and Wales. Disparity in earnings, educational achievement, mortality rates, childhood obesity, lung cancer and alcohol-related harm are but a few examples that highlight the existence of such inequality [7]. It is therefore likely that violence, with its strong inequality gradient,

would also be more prevalent in regions where levels of health and prosperity are low [8].

In this study, trends in violence according to ED data in England and Wales, over the 5-year period, 1st January 2005–31st December 2009 were investigated. The purpose of the study was to determine age, gender and region-specific rates of violence and violence trends and violence seasonality.

Methods

ED departments and injury records

Information on attendance date, age and gender of patients who reported injury in violence were collected from a stratified sample of 77 Types 1, 3 and 4 EDs (Type 1 = consultant led 24 h service with full resuscitation facilities; Type 3 = other types of ED/minor injury units; Type 4 = NHS walk-in centres) in the nine



Fig. 1. Distribution of EDs in the study sample by Government Office Regions.

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