

Assaults on police officers and emergency workers, 1999-00 to 2008-09

Purpose

In February 2010, Scottish Government, Justice Analytical Services was asked two parliamentary questions on the topic of assaults on police officers. The questions asked were:

On 9 February 2010, Robert Brown asked:

S3W-31613: how many assaults were reported against police officers in each of the last five years, broken down by police force. (Robert Brown)

On 12 February 2010, Bill Kidd asked:

S3W-31732: how many assaults on police officers have been reported in the last 10 years, broken down by police force. (Bill Kidd)

Examination of the data on recorded crime in response to these questions highlighted significant variations in classification amongst Scottish police forces. Although all such assaults were recorded under the Scottish Crime Recording Standard, they were not classified consistently. A special exercise was undertaken to investigate further, and this short paper reports on the results of that work.

Background

When an officer is assaulted, the crime could be recorded in three different ways; assaulting a police officer in the execution of his duty under the Police (Scotland) Act 1967; minor assault or assaulting an emergency worker under the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005. For serious assault or attempted murder these options do not apply.

However, the time period at which individual forces started recording assaults on police officers under the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005 varies significantly. Fife Constabulary began using the 'Minor assault of an emergency worker' crime code to record police officer assaults in 2006-07. Lothian and Borders started recording this way in August 2008 and all other forces started on 1st April 2009. This means that from 2009-10 onwards all minor police assaults are consistently recorded under 'minor assault of an emergency worker' across all eight police forces.

As a result of these changes to recording practices, when we answered PQ S3W-31613, we provided the number of minor assaults on an emergency worker recorded by the police. The data we provided on emergency workers was correct, but wouldn't have shown the full story of police officer assaults since for some forces these will have been recorded under the other 'Minor assault' categories.

To answer question S3W-31732 more fully, we have undertaken, in consultation with ACPOS Performance Management Business Area (PMBA) a special exercise to collect the data on police assaults from the eight Scottish police forces. It was agreed that such requests would be directed through the Association of Chief Officers in Scotland (ACPOS). The results of this exercise are presented below.

Assault of a police officer (pre 2009-10)

Table 1 shows the number of minor assaults on a police officer recorded by the police, over the time period 1999-00 to 2008-09. When an officer is assaulted, the assailant could be charged with assaulting a police officer in the execution of his duty under the Police (Scotland) Act 1967, with minor assault or with assaulting an emergency worker under the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005.

Due to differences in the systems used by police forces, not all police forces have been able to provide data for all of the last ten years. As a result, a Scotland total is not available prior to 2006-07.

Table 1: Minor Assault of a police officer by police force area, 1999-00 to 2008-09

Police force area	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Central ⁽¹⁾	N/A	N/A	400	401	354	395	382	394	375	286
Dumfries & Galloway ⁽¹⁾	N/A	N/A	90	157	167	102	124	174	125	122
Fife ⁽²⁾	N/A	312	351	350	309	356	406	412	436	371
Grampian	207	380	449	516	502	452	466	434	439	430
Lothian & Borders ⁽³⁾	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	873	789	646
Northern ⁽²⁾	N/A	129	172	190	189	203	177	192	178	171
Strathclyde	3,212	3,364	3,531	3,790	3,807	3,887	3,910	4,330	4,539	4,028
Tayside ⁽⁴⁾	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	419	409	475	372	427
Scotland⁽⁵⁾	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	7,284	7,253	6,481

1. Data not available prior to 2001-02

2. Data not available prior to 2000-01

3. Data not available prior to 2006-07

4. Data not available prior to 2004-05

5. Scotland totals not available prior to 2006-07 as data not available from all forces

N/A = Not Available

Table 2 shows the number of serious assaults on police officers recorded by the police, 1999-00 to 2008-09. Due to differences in the systems used by police forces, not all police forces have been able to provide data for all of the last ten years. As a result, a Scotland total is not available prior to 2001-02.

Table 2: Serious Assault of a police officer, by police force area, 1999-00 to 2008-09

Police force area	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Central ⁽¹⁾	N/A	N/A	4	4	0	2	1	3	3	0
Dumfries & Galloway ⁽¹⁾	N/A	N/A	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	0
Fife ⁽²⁾	N/A	5	4	4	4	1	1	0	1	1
Grampian ⁽²⁾	N/A	3	1	0	1	0	2	1	2	2
Lothian & Borders ⁽¹⁾	N/A	N/A	6	10	3	2	1	6	5	2
Northern ⁽²⁾	N/A	13	9	7	11	3	11	7	4	6
Strathclyde	17	25	28	11	12	21	22	14	10	7
Tayside	3	0	1	5	4	2	1	1	1	0
Scotland	N/A	N/A	55	42	35	31	41	32	26	18

1. Data not available prior to 2001-02

2. Data not available prior to 2000-01

3. Scotland total not available prior to 2001-02 as data not available for all forces

N/A = Not Available

Other emergency workers (pre 2009-10)

The Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005 came into force on 9 May 2005 and creates new offences in relation to assaulting, obstructing or hindering someone who is providing emergency services, or someone who is assisting an emergency worker who is responding to emergency circumstances. The Act also creates similar offences in respect of health workers on hospital premises and persons assisting such workers.

Tables 3 and 4 show minor and serious assaults on emergency workers (excluding police officers). Prior to the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005, these would have been recorded under Minor assault. However, not all police forces are able to identify where the assault has been on an emergency worker other than a police officer. Similarly, more serious assaults will continue to be recorded under serious assault, but not all forces are able to separately identify other emergency workers.

Table 3: Minor assault of an emergency worker, by police force area, 2005-06 to 2008-09

Police force area	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Central	0	9	11	12
Dumfries & Galloway	5	2	7	12
Fife	0	27	21	20
Grampian	6	17	14	19
Lothian & Borders ⁽¹⁾	N/A	78	73	98
Northern ⁽²⁾	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Strathclyde	73	189	205	222
Tayside	4	24	20	32
Scotland	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

1. Data not available prior to 2006-07

2. Minor assault cannot be broken down by occupation other than police officer

3. Scotland totals not available as data not available from all forces

N/A = Not Available

Table 4: Serious assault of an emergency worker, by police force area, 2004-05 to 2008-09

Police force area	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Central ⁽¹⁾	N/A	0	0	0	0
Dumfries & Galloway ⁽¹⁾	N/A	0	0	0	0
Fife ⁽¹⁾	N/A	0	0	0	0
Grampian ⁽¹⁾	N/A	0	0	0	0
Lothian & Borders ⁽²⁾	N/A	N/A	0	0	1
Northern ⁽³⁾	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Strathclyde ⁽²⁾	N/A	N/A	7	18	1
Tayside	1	0	1	0	0
Scotland	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

1. Data not available prior to 2005-06

2. Data not available prior to 2006-07

3. Serious assault cannot be broken down by occupation other than police officer

N/A = Not Available

Assault of a police officer (2009-10 onwards)

From 2009-10 onwards, all police forces are consistently recording minor assaults on police officers, as assaulting an emergency worker under the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005. The recorded crime data collection will then allow us to identify the number of minor assaults on emergency workers but will not be able to identify police or other emergency workers separately as the occupation of the victim will not be held centrally by the Scottish Government.

More serious assaults or attempted murders of emergency workers will continue to be recorded under the appropriate crime code.

**Justice Analytical services
June 2010**