

## CRIME AND JUSTICE

# Homicide in Scotland 2022-23

This bulletin presents statistics on crimes of homicide recorded by the police in Scotland in 2022-23. This includes the number of victims and accused for all recorded cases of Murder and Culpable homicide (common law). Statistics are also presented on the number of homicide incidents (irrespective of the number of victims or accused for each incident), the circumstances associated with the homicide, and additional details relating to the method, motive and relationship between the victim and the accused.

## Key Points

- In 2022-23, 52 victims of homicide were recorded, 2% (or one victim) fewer than the 53 victims recorded in 2021-22 (Table 1). This is the lowest number of recorded homicide victims since comparable records began in 1976.
- Over the latest 10 year period from 2013-14 to 2022-23, the number of victims fell by 16% (or 10 victims) from 62 to 52. (Table 1).
- Over the latest 20 year period from 2003-04 to 2022-23, the number of homicide victims in Scotland fell by 52% (or 57 victims) from 109 to 52. (Table 1).
- The biggest reduction in homicide victims over the last 20 years has been amongst young people aged 16-24. In the five years between 2003-04 to 2007-08 there were 126 victims in this age range. This dropped to 24 across the latest five years between 2018-19 to 2022-23. (Table 5)
- Of the 52 victims recorded in 2022-23, 75% (39) were male and 25% (13) were female (Table 5).
- In 2022-23, 73 persons were accused of homicide, of which 88% (64) were male and 12% (nine) were female (Table 6). For all the 52 homicide victims recorded in 2022-23, the associated case was solved.
- For each of the last 20 years, the most common method of killing was with a sharp instrument (Table 7). In 2022-23, a sharp instrument was the main method of killing for 58% (or 30) of homicide victims.
- For the latest year of 2022-23, the majority (54%) of male victims were killed by an acquaintance (21 of 39 male victims). Female victims were most likely

to be killed by a partner or ex-partner (46% - or 6 of 13 female victims).  
(Table 8)

- Whilst most recorded incidents of homicide in these statistics have one victim and one accused, some incidents can have multiple victims and (or) accused. There were 51 homicide incidents recorded in 2022-23, 2% (or 1 incident) fewer than the 52 recorded in 2021-22 (Table 1).

# Introduction

This bulletin includes all crimes of Murder and Culpable homicide (common law), with these two crimes collectively referred to as homicide throughout the bulletin. The associated tables referenced throughout this bulletin can be downloaded from [Homicide in Scotland statistics - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/homicide-in-scotland-statistics-2022-23/pages/introduction.aspx).

A [glossary](#) in the annex provides a full list of key variables used throughout this bulletin and what they mean.

The statistics on homicides are used alongside a range of other information to inform the Scottish Government's [Vision for Justice in Scotland](#). These statistics are also used by a wide range of stakeholders to monitor trends, for policy research and development, and for research purposes. The Homicide in Scotland statistical bulletin forms part of a series of bulletins produced by the Scottish Government on the criminal justice system, which can be found at: [Crime and justice statistics - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/crime-and-justice-statistics-2022-23/pages/introduction.aspx).

This bulletin excludes crimes of corporate homicide. The Scottish Government also publishes Recorded Crime in Scotland, which includes data on the category of 'Murder and Culpable Homicide' which includes these crimes. The 2022-23 edition can be accessed at: [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2022-23 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-in-scotland-2022-23/pages/introduction.aspx)

The data in this bulletin are collected separately from the data included in the Recorded Crime in Scotland bulletin. For the crimes of murder and culpable homicide, data are extracted from police recording systems at a different time point and so there may be discrepancies in the information presented here and the Recorded Crime in Scotland bulletin. In this bulletin homicide cases are included against the year in which the crime that led to the homicide is first recorded by the police. This is not necessarily the year in which the victim dies (and hence is recorded as a homicide), the year in which the accused is brought to trial for the crime, or the year in which the case is finally disposed of by the courts.

A [data and methodology statement](#) is available at the end of this document. This provides further information on the production of these statistics, the quality assurance undertaken and our approach to revisions.

## An Accredited Official Statistics Publication for Scotland

These statistics are [accredited official statistics](#). The Office for Statistics Regulation has independently reviewed and accredited these statistics as complying with the standards of trustworthiness, quality, and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

These statistics were accredited in June 2011 [Statistics on Homicide, Domestic Abuse, Firearm Offences and Firearm Certificates Recorded by the Police in Scotland – Office for Statistics Regulation \(statisticsauthority.gov.uk\)](#)



Accredited official statistics are called National Statistics in the [Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#).

Scottish Government statistics are regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

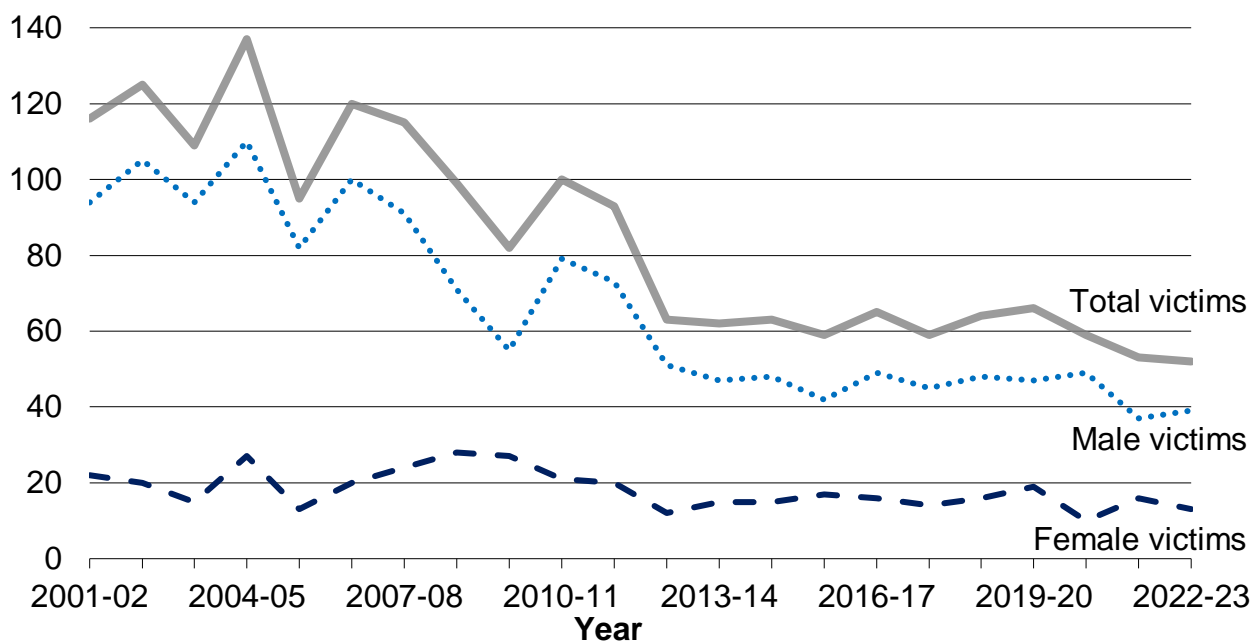
# Victims of homicide

The number of homicide victims has shown a downward trend since 2004-05. In 2022-23, there were 52 victims of homicide, 1 fewer than in 2021-22. This is the lowest number since comparable records began in 1976.

## Figure 1: Homicide victim numbers continue to fall

Total number of victims and victims by sex, Scotland, 2001-02 to 2022-23

### Number of victims



As can be seen from [figure 1](#), the reduction in victim numbers has primarily been driven by a reduction in male victims. For the five years from 2018-19 to 2022-23 there were 220 male victims of homicide – a 54% reduction compared to 477 for the 5 year period from 2003-04 to 2007-08. Over those same periods the number of female victims reduced by 25% from 99 to 74.

## Age and Sex of Victims

(Table 5)

In 2022-23 there were 39 male victims, representing 75% of all homicide victims. Since 2021-22 the number of male victims increased by 2 from 37 to 39, whilst the number of female victims decreased by three from 16 to 13.

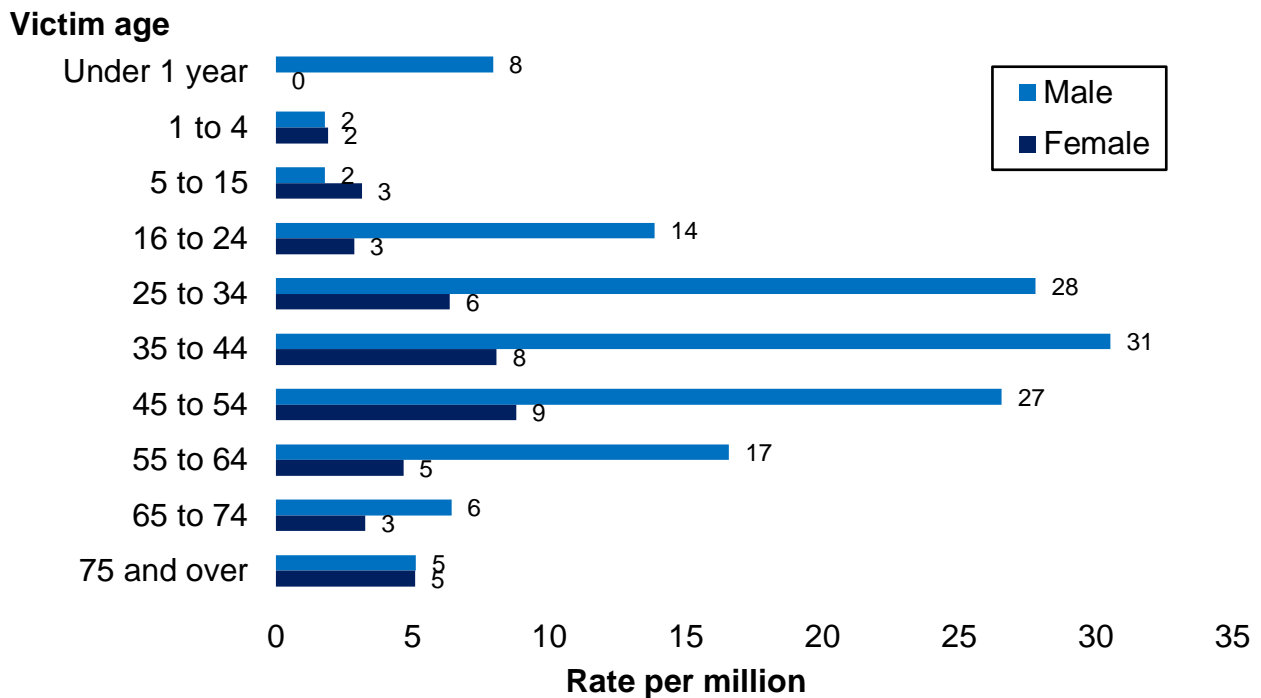
Males are more likely to be victims of homicide than females, with an overall rate of 15 victims per million population in 2022-23. The equivalent rate for females was five victims per million population.

The median age of a victim of homicide in 2022-23 was 47 years old, 5 years higher than in 2021-22 when the median age of a victim was 42 years old (Table 1). This is the highest median age of homicide victims since comparable records began in 1976.

[Figure 2](#) shows the victimisation rate by age group and sex for homicides since 2018-19 (i.e. for the past 5 years – representing 294 victims). For most age groups, the rate is higher for males than for females, though rates were very similar for those aged between 0 and 15 years old and 75 and over. The rate for males peaks in the 35 to 44 years old age groups and for females peaks in the 45 to 54 years old age group.

**Figure 2: The majority of homicide victims are male**

Age profile of homicide victimisation rate by sex, Scotland, 2018-19 to 2022-23

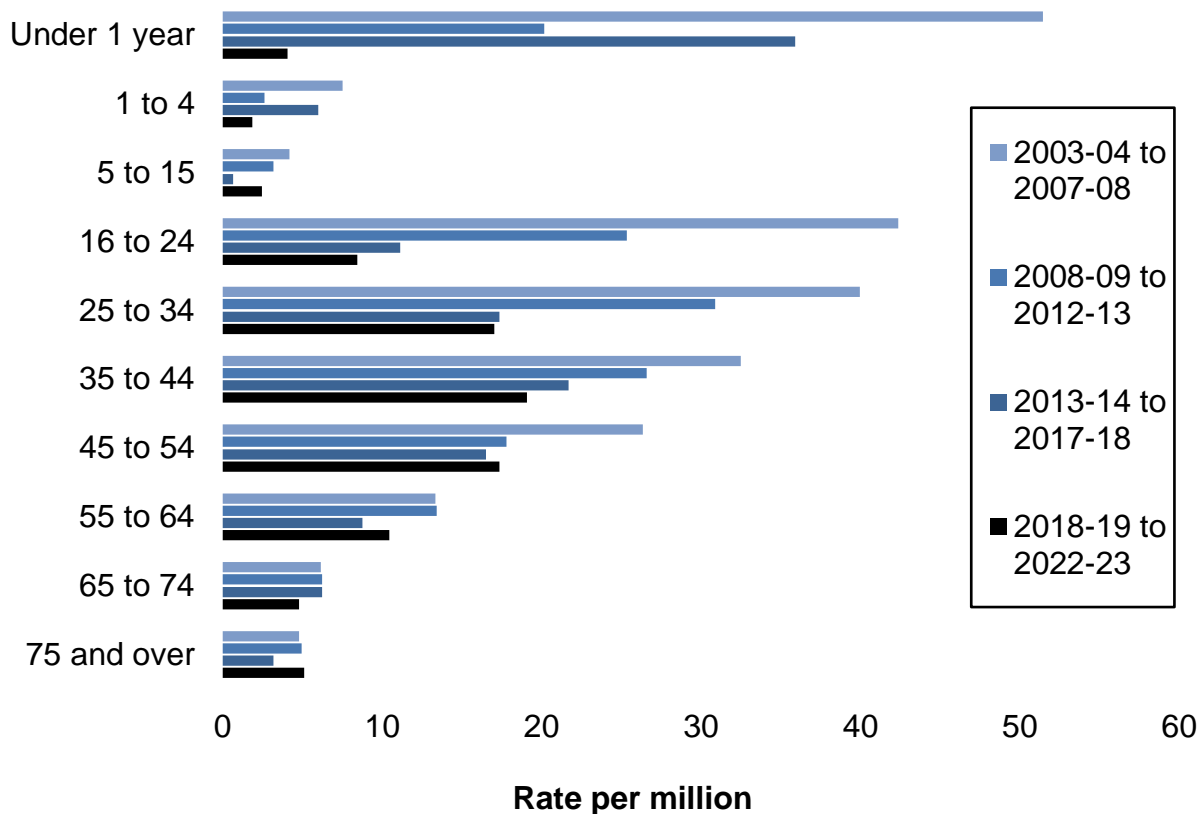


There has been a reduction in homicides over the last 20 years across all age groups under 65. The biggest reduction has been amongst victims aged 16-24. In the five years period from 2003-04 to 2007-08 there were 126 victims in this age range. This dropped to 24 across the latest five years period from 2018-19 to 2022-23.

**Figure 3: In the last 20 years homicide rates have dropped substantially for younger age groups**

Age profile of homicide victimisation rate by 5 year period, Scotland, 2003-04 to 2022-23

## Victim age



## Location of homicides

(Tables 2 and 3)

In 2022-23, Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire and City of Edinburgh had the highest number of homicide victims (seven each) (Table 2). In all 3 areas the share of national homicide victims was higher than their share of Scotland's population, albeit only slightly so in Glasgow City.<sup>1</sup>

- 13% versus 6% in North Lanarkshire
- 13% versus 10% in City of Edinburgh
- 13% versus 12% in Glasgow City

It is important to note however that victims may not necessarily reside in the local authority where the homicide took place.

Glasgow City has witnessed a relatively larger fall in homicides than Scotland as a whole in the last 20 years. Over the latest five year period from 2018-19 to 2022-23 there have been 51 homicides in Glasgow, a 70% reduction compared to 171 for

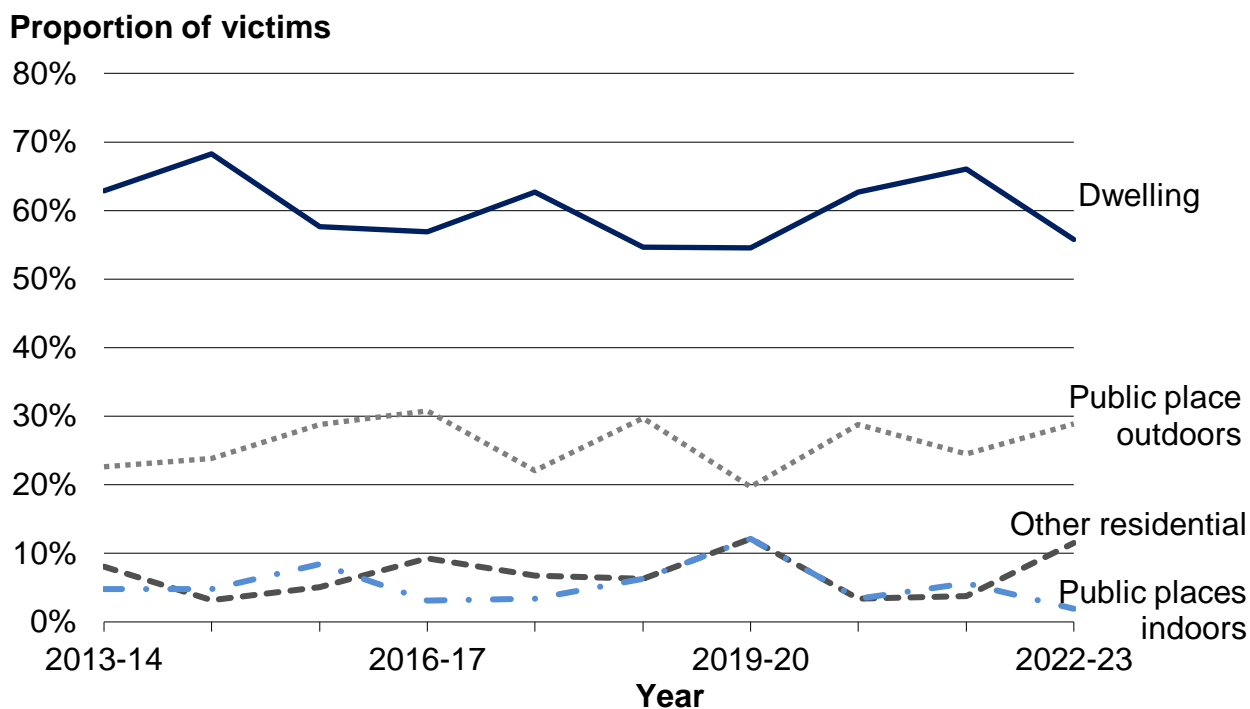
<sup>1</sup> (Population estimates are as at mid-year 2021 from the National Records of Scotland [Mid-2021 Population Estimates Scotland | National Records of Scotland](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk) ([nrscotland.gov.uk](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk)))

the five year period from 2003-04 to 2007-08. This compares to a 49% reduction in Scotland as a whole between these periods.

In 2022-23, 67% of homicides occurred within a residential location (dwelling and other residential), 29% in outdoor public places (street, footpath and open outdoor area) and 2% in indoor public places ([Figure 4](#)).

### Figure 4: Most homicides are located in residential dwellings

Location of homicides, where known, Scotland, 2013-14 to 2022-23





# Persons accused of homicide

Tables 1 and 6

The number of people accused of homicide has shown an overall downward trend since 2004-05. In 2022-23, there were 73 persons accused of homicide, 10 more than in 2021-22.

The vast majority of persons accused of homicide are male, making up 88% of all accused in 2022-23.

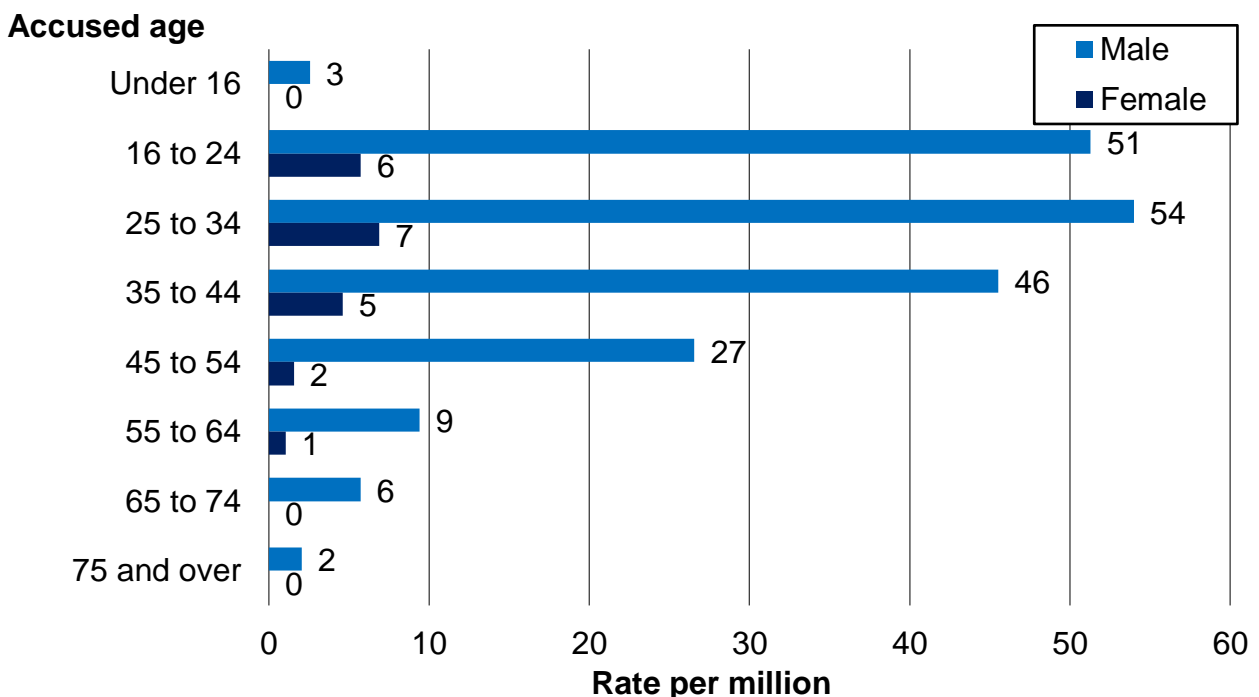
For all of the 52 homicide victims recorded in 2022-23, the associated case was solved.

In 2022-23, the total number of individuals accused of homicide equated to 13 per million population. The rates for those accused of homicide were highest for those aged 35-44 (29 per million population), 16-24 (27 per million population) and 25-34 (24 per million population).

[Figure 5](#) shows the rate for accused by age group and sex for homicides since 2018-19 (i.e. for the past 5 years – representing 366 accused). The rates for males accused of homicide per million population were considerably higher across all age groups than for females.

## Figure 5: The highest rates for persons accused of homicide are for men aged 16-44

Age and sex profile of persons accused of homicide per million population, Scotland, 2018-19 to 2022-23



In 2022-23, the median age of a person accused of homicide was 35 years old, which is the same as 2021-22. Over the past 10 years the median age of a person accused of homicide ranged between 29 and 35 years old. This is generally older than the preceding ten years which ranged between 23 and 30 years old.

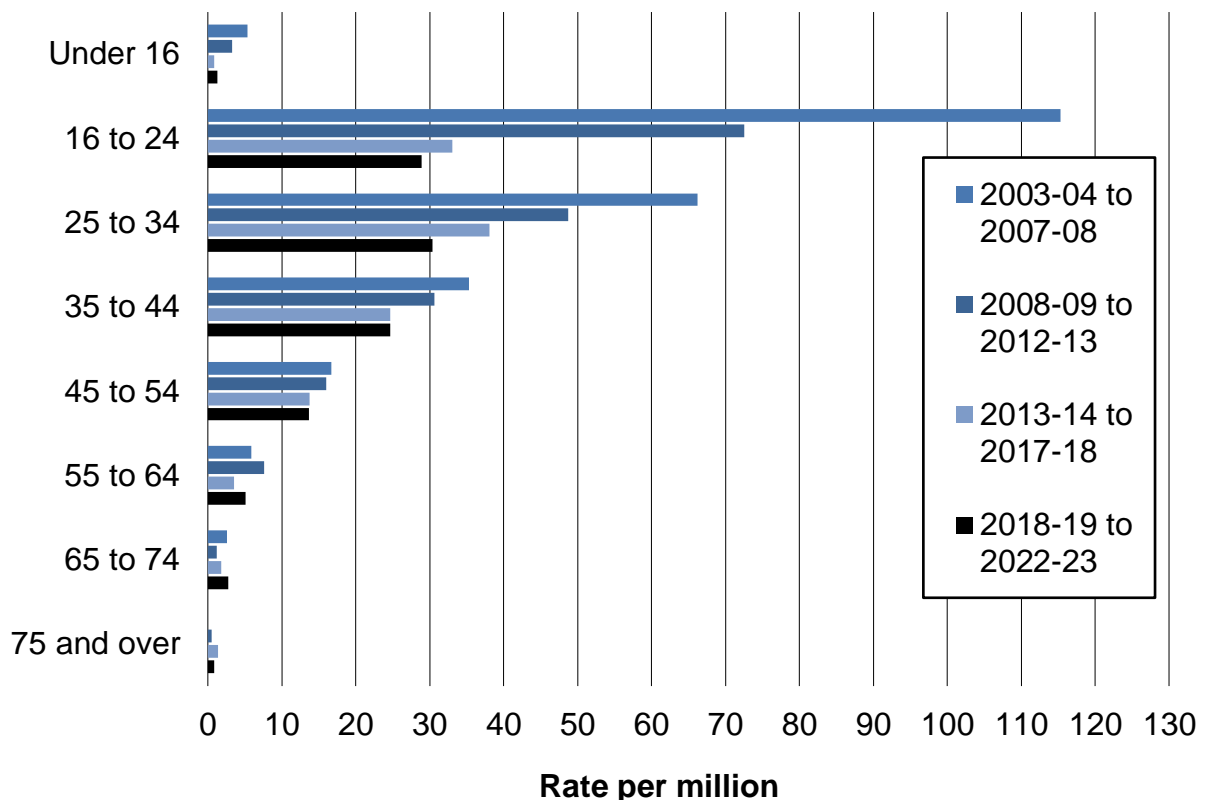
The median age of a person accused of homicide has been lower than the median age of victims of homicide in each of the last twenty years.

Over the last twenty years there has been a large reduction in the number of people accused of homicide, with the rate per million population dropping from 31 for the five year period from 2003-04 to 2007-08 to 13 for the five year period from 2018-19 to 2022-23. [Figure 6](#) shows that the biggest drop has been amongst persons aged 16-24, which has fallen from 115 per million population to 29 per million population across the same period.

**Figure 6: Over the last 20 years the biggest reduction in those accused of homicide has been amongst persons aged 16-24**

Age profile of persons accused of homicide per million population, by 5 year period, Scotland, 2003-04 to 2022-23

**Accused age**



# Method of Killing

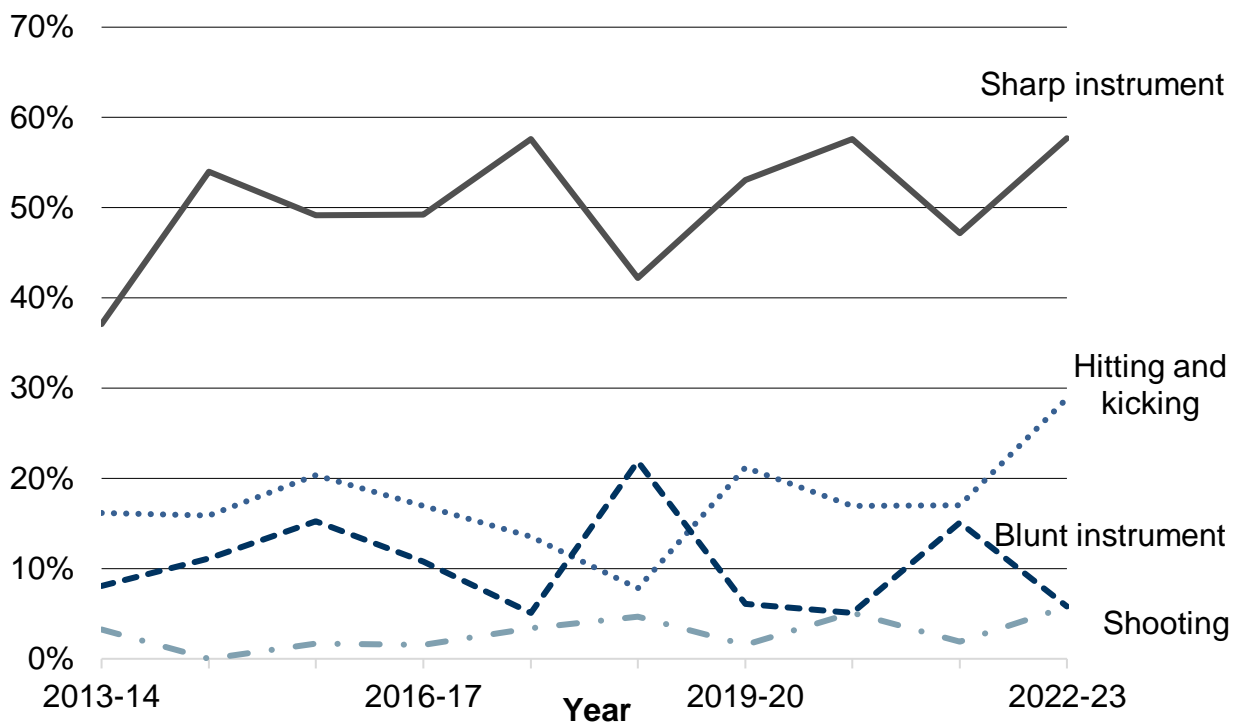
Table 7

The most common main method of killing in each of the last 10 years was with a sharp instrument. This includes 58% (30) of homicide victims in 2022-23, 23 of which involved a knife. The next most common main method was hitting and kicking, accounting for 29% (15) of homicide victims in 2022-23.

## Figure 7: Sharp instruments are the most common main method of killing

Victims of homicide by selected main method of killing, 2013-14 to 2022-23

### Proportion of victims



Homicide by shooting is relatively rare in Scotland. In 2022-23, there were three victims recorded. Since 2013-14 there have been 17 recorded victims of shooting, accounting for 3% of all homicide victims over this period.

# Relationship of main accused to victim

Tables 8-10

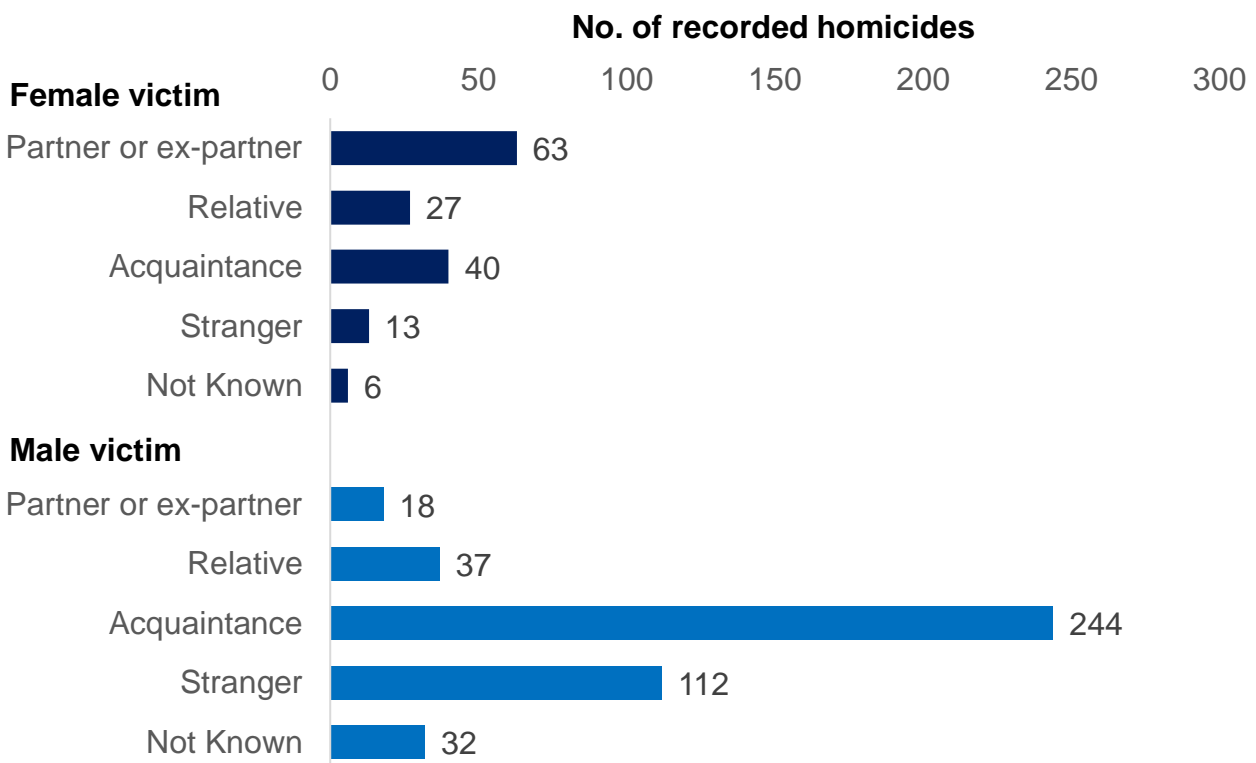
The victim and main accused were known to each other in a majority of cases, representing 39 (75%) of homicides solved in 2022-23. The accused and victim were not known to each other in eight homicides (15%). The relationship to the main accused was unknown in the remaining 5 homicides (5%).

For those 39 homicides where the victim and accused were known to each other, 26 (66%) were acquaintances, 8 (21%) were partners or ex-partners and 5 (13%) were relatives.

[Figure 8](#) shows the number of homicides for male and female victims by their relationship to the main accused for all victims since 2013-14. Over the past 10 years, most male victims were killed by an acquaintance (55%). In comparison, over the same period, female victims were most likely to be killed by a partner or ex-partner (42%).

**Figure 8: In the past 10 years most male victims were killed by an acquaintance whilst female victims were most likely to be killed by a partner or ex-partner.**

Relationship between victim and main accused, by victim sex, Scotland, ten year period, 2013-14 to 2022-23



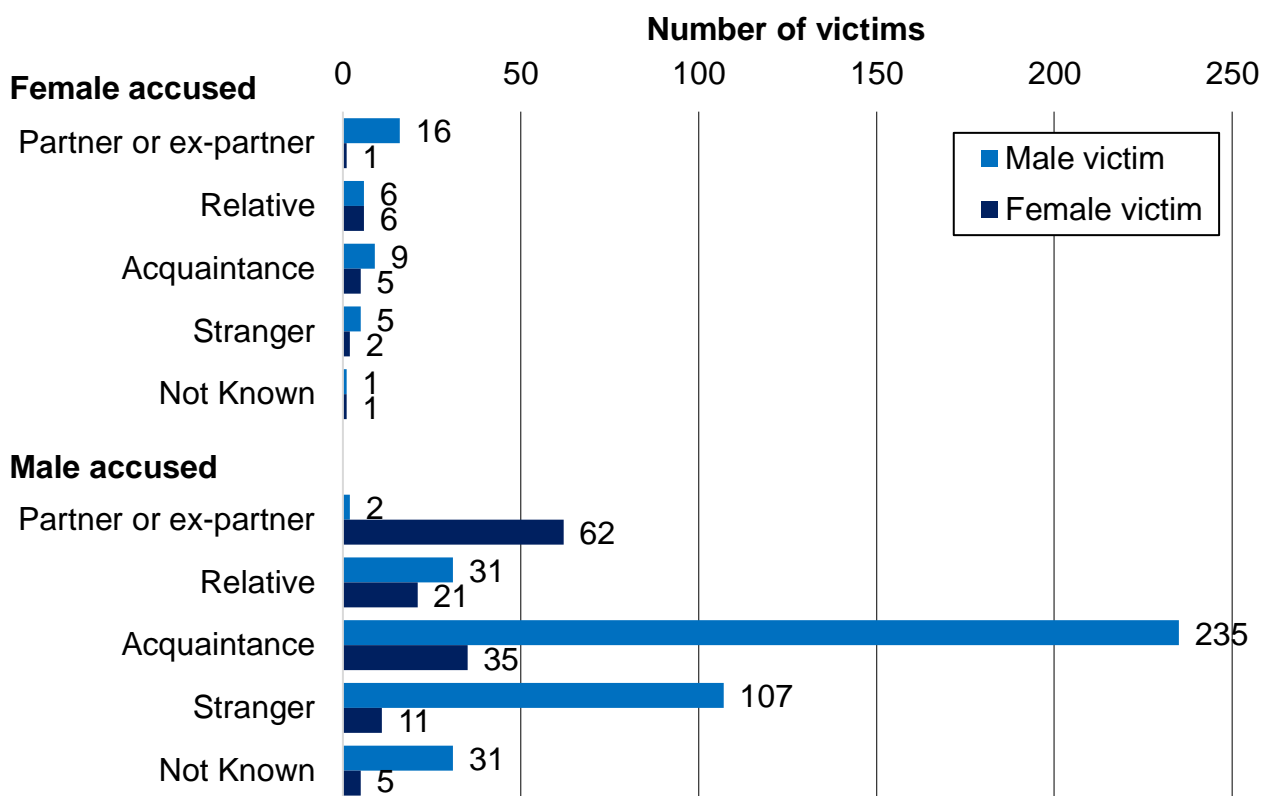
For the latest year of 2022-23, 54% (21 victims) of the 39 male victims were killed by an acquaintance. Of the 13 female victims, 46% (6 victims) were killed by a partner or ex-partner.

Table 9 shows that for the last five years, between 2018-19 and 2022-23, a total of 11 children under the age of 16 years were victims of homicide (where there was an accused person). Three were killed by one of their parents, one was killed by another relative, six were killed by acquaintances and one was killed by a stranger.

[Figure 9](#) shows that over two-thirds of all homicide cases (69%) recorded between 2013-14 and 2022-23 involved males killing males. A further 23% of cases involved males killing females, 6% involved females killing males and cases where the main accused and main victim were both females accounted for just 3% of the total number.

**Figure 9: Over two thirds of homicide cases between 2013-14 and 2022-23 involved males killing males.**

Relationship between main accused and victim by sex, Scotland, 2013-14 to 2022-23



# Main Motive

Tables 11-14

For the five-year period between 2018-19 and 2022-23 the main motive for committing homicide was known for 58% (167) of the 290 homicide victims where the homicide was solved. Of these 167 victims, the most common reasons for committing homicide were fight or quarrel, and rage or fury with 51% (86) of all victims where the motive was known killed in such circumstances. For a further 25% (41) of homicides where the motive was known, feud or faction rival was the main motive. (Table 11)

Thirty-four (65%) victims were reported to have been killed in drug-related homicide cases in 2022-23, of which 25 were male (Table 13). This is a decrease of 2 victims on the 36 reported in 2021-22. The number of drug-related homicide cases is higher over the past seven years than in preceding years, though Police Scotland advise that this may be due at least in part to an improvement in recording practice (i.e., better identification of where motives can include a drug-related element). Given this, users are advised to exercise some caution when comparing this variable with years prior to 2016-17.

None of the 52 homicides recorded in 2022-23 were reported to have a homophobic or racial motivation. For all homicides in the 10 years leading up to 2022-23, 1% had a homophobic or racist motivation (Table 14).

# Use of alcohol and drugs

Table 15

Over the last 10 years, from 2013-14 to 2022-23 the alcohol and drug status of persons accused of homicide has been unknown for 52% of accused persons. Of the remaining 367 persons where the drug and alcohol status was known.

- 49% (178) were under the influence of alcohol.
- 8% (29) were under the influence of drugs.
- 28% (103) were under the influence of alcohol and drugs.
- 16% (57) were not under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

# Homicide incidents

Table 1

A single incident of homicide is counted for each crime involving Murder or Culpable homicide (common law), irrespective of the number of victims or accused. Whilst most recorded incidents of homicide in these statistics have one victim and one accused, some incidents can have multiple victims and (or) accused.

The number of homicide incidents recorded by the police in Scotland decreased by 2% (or 1 incident) between 2021-22 and 2022-23 from 52 to 51. This is the lowest number of recorded homicide incidents since comparable data became available in 1976.

Homicide incidents involving more than one victim are relatively rare, in 2022-23 there was only one incident with more than one victim.

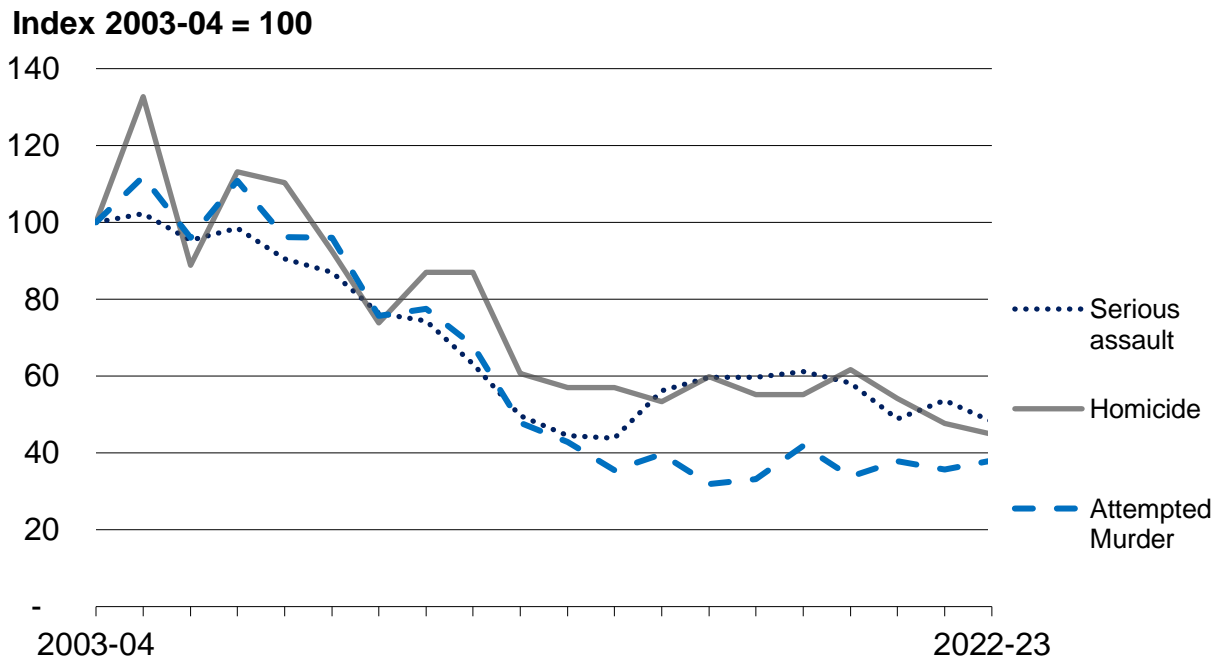
# Comparator statistics

Table 4

This bulletin has reported a decreasing trend in homicides over the longer term. [Figure 10](#) shows this trend over the last 20 years and compares it to the trend in attempted murder and serious assaults. This information is taken from the recorded crime in Scotland bulletin [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2022-23 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#). It shows that over the longer-term trends in homicide have matched other violent crimes, having fallen over a ten year period before 2013-14, they have remained relatively stable over the most recent ten year period.

**Figure 10: Trends in homicide, follow trends in other non-violent sexual crime**

Indices in selected crimes of violence, Scotland, 2003-04 to 2022-23



Similar to Scotland, England & Wales also produce National Statistics on Homicide, which is extracted from a dedicated database - the Home Office Homicide Index. The latest data published is for the 2021-22 reporting year available at [Homicide in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#).

Direct comparisons between Scotland and England & Wales should be treated with some caution due to uncertainty around different counting and classification conventions.

Further to this, users should note that in England & Wales, as in Scotland, it is possible for homicides that occurred sometime in the past to be recorded in more



recent years. For example, whilst the data for 2022-23 are not yet available, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has previously highlighted that earlier figures for 2016-17 included the 96 victims of Hillsborough which occurred in 1989, representing 14% of all victims in 2016-17.

One area where some general comparisons can be made are the broad trends in changes over time between Scotland and England & Wales, though still allowing for the caveats outlined above.

In Scotland, the number of homicides has fallen over the longer term but remained relatively stable during 2012-13 to 2020-21 (with between 59 and 66 victims each year) before falling to an, at the time, record low of 53 homicides in 2021-22. The latest publication for 2021-22 reported that in England & Wales the number of homicides recorded in the year ending March 2022 was 23% higher than the previous year, but similar to the four pre-pandemic years from the year ending March 2017 to the year ending March 2020.

One notable difference between Scotland and England & Wales relates to the age of homicide victims. As reported elsewhere in this bulletin, there has been a steep fall in the number of homicide victims in the 16-24 age group in Scotland over the past 20 years. This trend has not been seen in England & Wales.

- Over the 5 years between 2017-18 and 2021-22 the average rate of homicide for the 16-24 age group in Scotland was 10 per million population per year, slightly lower than the rate for the whole population (11 per million population). (Table 5).
- The average homicide rate for 16-24 year olds in England & Wales for the five years from 2017-18 to 2021-22 was 19 per million population, substantially higher than the average rate for the whole population (11 per million population).

# Glossary

## **Accused**

- (i) A person who has been arrested in respect of an offence initially classified as homicide and charged with homicide; or
- (ii) A person who is suspected by the police of having committed the offence but is known to have died or committed suicide prior to arrest/being charged.

## **Accused (Co-accused)**

For those cases with multiple accused which are currently recorded as homicide, the co-accused are included in the statistics in this bulletin regardless of whether or not they were ultimately charged with homicide.

## **Accused (Main accused)**

Where more than one person is accused of committing a homicide, the main accused is taken as the person who received the severest penalty. If more than one possible main accused is identified, then the first person recorded on the statistical returns that is submitted annually by Police Scotland is selected.

## **Alcohol status**

On 1 April 2013, Police Scotland changed their operational practices when reporting on the alcohol status of the accused and victim. Individuals are no longer referred to as being 'drunk' and are referred to as 'being under the influence of alcohol'.

## **Current and initial classification of homicide**

Some cases initially classified as homicide will, on the basis of criminal proceedings, no longer be classified as such at a later date.

## **Date**

A homicide is included against the year in which the crime that led to the homicide is first recorded by the police. This is not necessarily the year in which the victim dies, the year in which the accused is brought to trial for the crime, or the year in which the case is finally disposed of by the courts.

## **Homicide incident**

A single incident of homicide is counted for each crime involving murder or culpable homicide (common law) irrespective of the number of victims or accused.

## **Main method**

Only one method of killing has been selected for each victim. The main method is taken to be the most serious of those methods recorded. Methods of killing have been ranked in the following order of priority: shooting, sharp instrument, blunt instrument, hitting and kicking, strangulation or asphyxiation, drowning, fire, poisoning and other or unknown.

## **Main method (poisoning)**

The main method of “poisoning” includes the use of drugs, gas and carbon monoxide poisoning.

**Main method (sharp instrument)**

The term “sharp instrument” includes knives, broken bottles, swords, sharpened screwdrivers and any other pointed or edged weapons.

**Main motive**

The motive behind committing a homicide is as determined by the police.

**Main motive (drug-related)**

A “drug-related” homicide is defined as a homicide motivated by a need to obtain drugs or money for drugs, a homicide of or by a consumer or supplier of drugs, a homicide committed in order to steal proceeds of the drugs trade or a homicide as a consequence of rivalry between users and/or dealers within the drugs trade.

**Relationship**

When considering the relationship of the main accused person to the victim, the term “partner or ex-partner” includes: spouse, separated or divorced spouse, cohabitee, lover, boy/girlfriend and ex-boy/girlfriend.

**Solved cases**

The distinction between “solved” and “unsolved” homicide cases is where an accused individual is attached to it (solved) and where an accused individual has not been identified (unsolved).

**Victim (main victim)**

If a person is accused of killing more than one victim, the main victim is the person for whom the accused received the severest penalty for killing. Where more than one possible main victim can be identified, then the first person recorded on the statistical return is selected as the main victim.

## Data and Methodology

The statistics presented in this bulletin are based on a snapshot of Police Scotland's live homicide database at an agreed date. Police Scotland maintain a continuously updated list of homicide cases that the Scottish Government uses to populate its own database of homicides in Scotland.

The data provided by Police Scotland go through a series of validation checks, whereby any queries raised through this quality assurance process are fed back to Police Scotland for consideration and discussion. It should be noted that homicides are very high-profile crimes, and – in many instances – discussed openly in public. Both Scottish Government statisticians and homicide specialists within Police Scotland consider it unlikely that any major errors exist (as opposed to our practice outlined below for making revisions).

Since it is a 'live' system, amendments to Police Scotland's database can arise after the data has been submitted to the Scottish Government (for example, a serious assault may be reclassified to a culpable homicide sometime after the crime was first recorded by the police).

To allow for these changes, we make retrospective revisions to earlier data for all years since the formation of Police Scotland (i.e. 2013-14 onwards). There were no such cases this time. Earlier revisions are detailed in previous editions of this publication available here [Homicide in Scotland statistics - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/homicide-in-scotland-statistics-2017-18/pages/2-1-revisions-to-previous-editions.aspx).

As National Statistics, this information on homicide in Scotland is subject to continuous review by analysts to ensure it remains of high value for users. When producing the 2017-18 statistics, we identified that there is a tendency for the first publication of figures for a particular year to be revised upwards in subsequent bulletins - due to developments with specific cases. As outlined above, an example of this could be where a victim of serious assault dies of their injuries sometime after the incident, which could subsequently lead to the case being reclassified to a culpable homicide. Decisions at the prosecution stage can also have an impact, leading to some crimes being reclassified to homicides.

Given this, we made a small amendment to the data collection process for these statistics in 2017-18. As with earlier bulletins, we continue to present statistics based on a snapshot of Police Scotland's live homicide database as at the end of the reporting year. However, in addition to this, we now carry out a further check during the month before publication – whereby any crimes recorded during previous reporting years but not reclassified to a homicide until after the current reporting year, can now be included in the first publication of that year's statistics – and not as a subsequent revision. There were no such cases in 2022-23.

This change further improves the quality of these statistics as it reduces the need for subsequent revisions to the data, though clearly they can still occur should crimes be reclassified to a homicide after the additional check has been carried out.

In addition to the above consideration of our revisions policy, we also previously discussed with Police Scotland the increase in homicide cases with a drug-related motive from 2016-17 onwards. Police Scotland advise that this may be due at least in part to an improvement in recording practice (i.e. better identification of where motives can include a drug-related element). Given this, users are advised to exercise some caution when comparing this variable with years prior to 2016-17.

## Tell us what you think

We are always interested to hear from our users about how our statistics are used, and how they can be improved.

### Feedback survey

We'd appreciate it if you would complete our short [feedback survey](#) on this publication.

### Enquiries

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