

Deaths During or Following Police Contact: Statistics for England and Wales 2007/08

1 Introduction

The Police Reform Act 2002 gave police forces in England and Wales a statutory duty to refer to the IPCC any incident involving a death that has arisen from police contact.¹ The IPCC considers the circumstances of all the cases referred to it and decides whether to investigate the death.

This chapter relates to deaths during or following police contact which occurred between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008. The purpose is to provide a definitive set of figures for England and Wales and an overview of the circumstances that led to these fatalities.

In producing these statistics, the circumstances of all deaths referred to the IPCC were examined to determine whether they met the criteria for inclusion under one of the following categories:

- fatal road traffic incidents
- fatal shootings
- deaths in or following police custody
- deaths during or following other types of police contact.

¹ Paragraph 4(1)(a) and 13(1)(a), Schedule 3, Part 1, Police Reform Act 2002. As amended by the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005, Schedule 12.

Definitions of Deaths During or Following Police Contact

Deaths of police personnel or incidents that involve off-duty police personnel are not included in these categories.

1. ROAD TRAFFIC FATALITIES

includes deaths of motorists, cyclists or pedestrians arising from police pursuits, police vehicles responding to emergency calls and other police traffic-related activity.

This would not include the following:

- Deaths following a road traffic incident where the police have attended immediately after the event as an emergency service.

2. FATAL SHOOTINGS

includes fatalities where police officers fire the fatal shots.

3. DEATHS IN OR FOLLOWING POLICE CUSTODY

includes deaths of persons who have been arrested or otherwise detained by the police. It includes deaths which occur whilst a person is being arrested or taken into detention. The death may have taken place on police, private or medical premises, in a public place or in a police or other vehicle.

This would include the following:

- Deaths which occur during or following police custody where injuries which contributed to the death were sustained during the period of detention.
- Deaths which occur in or on the way to hospital (or other medical premises) following or during transfer from police custody.
- Deaths which occur as a result of injuries or other medical problems which are identified or develop while a person is in custody.
- Deaths which occur while a person is in police custody having been detained under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 or other legislation

This would not include the following:

- Deaths (including suicides) which occur after a person has been released from police custody, except those that meet the criteria outlined above.
- Deaths of individuals who have been transferred to the care of another agency and subsequently die whilst in their care.

4. DEATHS DURING OR FOLLOWING OTHER POLICE CONTACT

includes deaths where a link can be established between the police contact and the death, and which did not involve arrest or other detention.

This would include the following:

- Deaths which occur after the police are called to attend a domestic incident which results in a fatality.
- Deaths which occur while a person is actively attempting to evade arrest. This includes instances where the death is self-inflicted.
- Deaths which occur when the police are in attendance at a siege situation, including where a person kills himself or someone else.
- Deaths which occur after the police have been contacted following concerns regarding a person's welfare and there is some concern about the nature of the police response.

This would not include the following:

- The death of someone who has attended a police station as a visitor, witness or in a professional capacity.
- Deaths which occur when the police attend an incident where a person receives, or has received fatal injuries, either self-inflicted or otherwise, such as when they have been called to a reported suicide attempt and there are no concerns about the behaviour of the officers involved.
- Deaths which occur in a police vehicle when that vehicle is being used in lieu of an ambulance to transport a person to a medical facility.

2 Findings

In 2007/08 there were 75 deaths during or following police contact, of which: information on the people who died and give details on the nature

- **23** were **road traffic fatalities**
- **5** was a **fatal police shootings**
- **21** were **deaths in or following police custody**
- **26** were **deaths during or following other police contact.**

Below we present demographic information on the people who died and give details on the nature of these deaths. The Appendix contains additional information on those people who died in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. It also contains additional information on the nature of deaths and details fatalities across police forces.

Since April 2006, deaths which occur during or following contact with HMRC and SOCA have to be referred to the IPCC and will therefore be reported on here. In 2007/08 HMRC referred one death which met the criteria for inclusion in the statistics. There were no deaths during or following contact reported by SOCA.

Road traffic fatalities

Demographics

During 2007/08, there were 17 police-related RTIs, which resulted in the deaths of 23 individuals. Sixteen of those who died were male and seven were female. The average age at the time of death was 40 years: seven of the people who died were under 21 years of age. Five people were reported to be from minority ethnic groups. Of these, one individual was of Asian origin, one person was a Brazilian national and three people were of Black ethnic origin.

Nature of death

Seventeen people died during or shortly after a **police pursuit**. Of these:

- nine individuals were the driver of, or a passenger in, the pursued vehicle and died when their vehicle crashed into a tree, or collided with another vehicle
- six people died after their car was hit by a vehicle being pursued by the police
- on two occasions, a pedestrian was struck by a vehicle being pursued by officers.

One of the 23 fatalities involved a police vehicle that was **responding to an emergency call**. The incident occurred when the police vehicle collided with another vehicle that had crossed its path.

Five fatalities occurred during **'other' types of police traffic activity**, for example, standard police patrol. Of these:

- three took place after the vehicle they were driving collided with a police vehicle
- one person suffered fatal injuries after the motorcycle on which they were the pillion passenger failed to stop when signalled to do so by officers
- one incident occurred after a pedestrian crossed the road, walking into the path of a police motorcyclist.

Fatal shootings

Four men and one woman were fatally shot by police officers in 2007/08. Two of the shootings involved armed officers from Kent Police and three people were shot by officers from the Metropolitan Police Service. Two of these people died during the same incident. Three of the individuals were reported to be from a Black background and two were White. Their ages ranged from 36 to 52 years.

Deaths in or following police custody

Demographics

Twenty-one people died in or following police custody, 20 were male and one was female. Eighteen individuals were reported to be White, one person was of Black ethnic origin, one individual was of mixed White and Asian background, and one person was identified as being Latin American. The average age of those who died was 42 years, with the youngest person reported to be 20 years old.

Nature of death

Two of the 21 people were declared dead while in police custody. Of these, one man died after collapsing in his cell, and the other died in the police van after experiencing breathing difficulties on arrival at the police station. Nineteen people died in hospital after having been taken ill, or identified as unwell,

whilst in police custody.

Five of the 21 people who died were identified as having mental health needs. Two of them had been detained under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983. Seventeen people were known to have some link with drugs or alcohol. For example, they had recently consumed, were intoxicated with, or were found to be in possession of drugs or alcohol at the time of arrest. The cause of death for eight individuals was found to be directly related to drug or alcohol use. Of these:

- two individuals died after being restrained whilst under the influence of stimulant drugs (one death was the result of excited delirium and the other of a cardiac arrest)
- two of the deaths were caused by cocaine intoxication
- two people died from symptoms associated with long term alcohol misuse
- one person died after consuming a combination of methadone and alcohol
- one individual asphyxiated on plastic wraps of drugs he swallowed during arrest.

For more information on cause of death see Appendix.

Deaths during or following other police contact

Demographics

Twenty-six people died during or following other police contact, 20 were male and six were female. Of the 26 individuals, 24 were White and two were of a mixed ethnic background. The average age of those who died was 37 years.

Nature of death

This category of death is broad and includes deaths that involve a range of circumstances. In many of these cases, the circumstances are being investigated to identify whether officers could have done more to try to prevent the death. The 26 deaths in this category can be grouped as follows.

Six of the 26 deaths occurred when the individual was apparently trying to avoid contact with officers. Of these:

- two people died when they were fleeing officers on foot – one was run over attempting to cross a road and the other died after running onto live railway lines

Table 1.1
Fatalities by type of death and financial year, 2004/05 to 2007/08

	Fatalities by Financial Year				
	2004/05 N	2005/06 N	2006/07 N	2007/08 N	Change in fatalities 06/07 to 07/08 N
Road traffic fatalities	44	48	36	23	-13
Fatal shootings	3	5	1	5	4
Deaths in or following police custody	36	28	27	21	-6
Deaths during or following other police contact	24	39	20	26	6
Total deaths	107	120	84	75	-9

- four people died following a jump, or fall, from a balcony or window while officers were present at the premises.

Six of the deaths were apparent suicides. Of these:

- two men took their lives while officers were present at the address. One individual cut his throat while armed officers surrounded his property and the other man shot himself after shooting dead a police officer
- four of the deaths occurred after police contact. In three instances the police had been contacted either directly, or by a family member, regarding a suicide threat and one woman killed herself a few hours after speaking to officers about an incident of domestic violence. In all four cases there is concern about the police response to the initial contact.

Six people died after the police had been contacted with concerns about their behaviour or welfare:

- in two instances, individuals died after officers decided no action was necessary after speaking to them in the street
- four people died after there was an allegedly² flawed response by the police which meant that the person had already died or was very seriously ill by the time they were found.

² At the time of writing, many of these cases were subject to an ongoing investigation. Therefore, the circumstances presented here relate to those 'alleged' at the time the incident was reported to the IPCC and could change on completion of an inquest or investigation.

Five deaths were alleged murders. Of these:

- three women and one man were allegedly murdered by their partners following recent contact with officers
- in another case, there were concerns about the police handling of a case which resulted in a man allegedly being murdered by his neighbour following a longstanding dispute.

The remaining three deaths involved:

- two people dying shortly after being restrained by officers. In both these cases, officers restrained the individual when they were assisting ambulance staff to administer treatment, rather than seeking to make an arrest. One of these men had an existing serious head injury and the other was suspected to be suffering from a diabetes-related fit
- one man collapsing during a verbal confrontation with officers after they had entered his premises during a suspected domestic incident.

Trends

This section makes some comparisons between deaths in 2007/08 and those which occurred in the previous three financial years. The figures presented in Table 1.1 show a decrease of nine deaths in the overall number of fatalities from 84³ in 2006/07 to

³ This is an increase of two deaths from the figure given in the report 'Deaths During or Following Police Contact: Statistics for England and Wales 2006/07'. One of these was not referred to the IPCC until after the 2006/07 report had been compiled. The other was only considered suitable for inclusion following an investigation.

Table 1.2
Incidents by type of death and financial year, 2004/05 to 2007/08

	Fatalities by Financial Year				
	2004/05 N	2005/06 N	2006/07 N	2007/08 N	Change in incidents 06/07 to 07/08 N
Road traffic fatalities	43	42	35	17	-18
Fatal shootings	3	5	1	4	3
Deaths in or following police custody	36	28	27	21	-6
Deaths during or following other police contact	23	37	19	26	7
Total deaths	105	112	82	68	-14

75 in 2007/08. Much of this change is accounted for by a decrease in the number of road traffic fatalities and also fewer deaths occurring in or following police custody.

Table 1.2 shows the number of separate incidents which resulted in fatalities. There are more fatalities than incidents because a single incident – for example, a road traffic collision – can result in the death of two or more individuals. When looking at incidents rather than fatalities, the decrease over the year is more marked. In 2007/08 there were 14 fewer fatal incidents, with 68 in 2007/08 compared with 82 in the previous year.

Road Traffic Fatalities

The number of road traffic fatalities decreased by 13, from 36 in 2006/07 to 23 in 2007/08. When looking at the number of separate road traffic incidents, the decrease is more marked – a fall of 18 incidents, from 35 in 2006/07 to 17 in 2007/08. This notable difference is because in 2007/08 three incidents resulted in a total of nine fatalities. In 2006/07 only one road traffic incident resulted in multiple deaths when two people died in the same collision. The number of incidents has reduced across all types of road traffic collisions. This includes eight fewer fatal pursuits and eight fewer incidents involving ‘other’ police traffic activity, for example, collisions that occur during standard police patrol. Further information on road traffic fatalities can be found in the Appendix.

Deaths in or following police custody

Since 2004/05, the number of deaths in or following police custody has decreased annually, with a fall of six deaths in the most recent financial year (from 27 in 2006/07 to 21 in 2007/08). In 2007/08, there were no apparent suicides in police custody compared to two in 2006/07, one in 2005/06 and two in 2004/05. In 2008/09 the IPCC will conduct a detailed review of custody deaths over several years which will seek to establish possible reasons for this ongoing fall. The Appendix contains further information on deaths in or following police custody in the last four financial years.

Deaths during or following other police contact

In this financial year there has been an increase of six reported deaths occurring during or following police contact, from 20 in 2006/07 to 26 in 2007/08. As stated in previous reports, the deaths included in this category involve a diverse range of circumstances which makes it difficult to identify one specific set of circumstances that accounts for changes in the numbers of fatalities. The broad definition applied to this category also means that, out of all the death categories, this is the most likely to fluctuate over time. The only point of note is that in 2007/08 only one death occurred in a siege situation compared with four in 2006/07 and three in 2005/06.

Apparent Suicides⁴ Following Release from Police Custody

The IPCC also collates figures on apparent suicides following release from police custody. These figures are presented separately from the overall statistics on deaths during or following police contact. This has proved a difficult area to define and previous analysis has shown inconsistencies in the referral of these deaths across forces. IPCC guidance now asks forces to refer all fatalities that occur within two days of release from police custody, or those where the period spent in custody may have been relevant to the subsequent death.

In 2007/08, the IPCC was notified of 45 apparent suicides that occurred after people had been released from police custody and that met the criteria for inclusion in this category. Nearly all of these deaths (44 of the 45) occurred within two days of release, with 28 occurring within 24 hours of release. In many of these cases, a causal link between the police contact and the death has not been established, but the case has been included because of the proximity between the contact and the death. The IPCC decided that it was necessary for it to have some involvement in the investigation of eight of these fatalities.

Just over half of the individuals (23) were reported to have known mental health needs and two of them had been detained under the Mental Health Act 1983. Eighteen people were reported to be in possession or under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time they were arrested, or were known substance users. Four of these individuals had been arrested for a drink- or drug-related offence. Twelve of those who died were arrested for a sexual offence, with nine of these detained in connection with sexual offences or indecent images of children.

⁴ The term 'suicide' does not necessarily relate to a coroner's verdict as, in most cases, verdicts are still pending. In these instances, the case is only included if, after considering the nature of death, the circumstances suggest that death was the intended outcome of a self-inflicted act, for example, a hanging, or where there was some evidence of 'suicidal ideation', such as a suicide note.

Investigations

Once the IPCC is notified of a fatality, it considers the circumstances of the case and decides whether to independently investigate, or alternatively to manage or supervise a police investigation. In some circumstances it is decided that a particular case is best dealt with locally by the police force in which it occurred.

Table 1.3 shows the level of investigation for each of the fatalities in 2007/08.⁵ In 2007/08, the IPCC had some form of involvement in the investigation of 69 per cent of fatalities (52).⁶ Compared with 2006/07, there has been an increase in the number and proportion of deaths independently investigated by the IPCC, from 26 per cent in 2006/07 to 49 per cent in 2007/08. There has been a corresponding decrease in the number and proportion of fatalities subject to managed and supervised investigations. In 2007/08, 19 per cent of investigations into deaths were managed compared to 37 per cent in 2006/07. Only 1 per cent were supervised compared to 11 per cent in 2006/07. At the same time local investigations increased from 26 per cent in 2006/07 to 31 per cent in 2007/08.

⁵ The type of investigation can be re-determined at any stage throughout the investigative proceedings as deemed appropriate by the IPCC. In 2007/08, investigations into ten fatalities were re-determined. In five cases the IPCC increased its level of oversight and in five incidents the level of IPCC involvement was reduced. The investigation type reported on here is that most recently recorded.

⁶ To maintain consistency with the rest of this section, the table includes details of individual fatalities rather than incidents. However, it is important to note that this overestimates the actual number of investigations, as in the table an investigation involving multiple fatalities will be counted more than once, for each fatality that occurred.

2. Findings DEATHS DURING OR FOLLOWING POLICE CONTACT

Table 1.3

Deaths during or following police contact by type of fatality and investigation type, 2007/08

Type of investigation	Road traffic fatalities		Fatal shootings		Death in or following police custody		Deaths during or following other police contact		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Independent	6	26	5	100	11	52	15	58	37	49
Managed	6	26	0	-	2	10	6	23	14	19
Supervised	1	4	0	-	0	-	0	-	1	1
Total IPCC Involvement	13	57	5	100	13	62	21	81	52	69
Local	10	43	0	-	8	38	5	19	23	31
Total Deaths	23	100	5	100	21	100	26	100	75	100

Note: 1. Investigation type as reported on the IPCC Case Tracking Management System, April 2008.

2. Percentages are rounded and therefore may not add up to 100 per cent.

Appendix:

Tables

Table A1.1
Type of Death by Gender, 2007/08

Gender	Road traffic fatalities		Fatal shootings		Deaths in or following police custody		Deaths during or following other police contact		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	16	70	4	800	20	95	20	77	60	80
Female	7	30	1	20	1	5	6	23	15	20
Total	23	100	5	100	21	100	26	100	75	100

Percentages are rounded and therefore may not add up to 100 per cent.

Table A1.2
Type of Death by Age Group, 2007/08

Age group	Road traffic fatalities		Fatal shootings		Deaths in or following police custody		Deaths during or following other police contact		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Under 18 yrs	1	4	0	-	0	-	0	-	1	1
18-20 yrs	6	26	0	-	1	5	2	8	9	12
21-30 yrs	4	17	0	-	3	14	5	19	12	16
31-40 yrs	4	17	4	80	6	29	9	35	23	31
41-50 yrs	1	4	0	-	7	33	7	27	15	20
51-60 yrs	1	4	1	20	2	10	2	8	6	8
61 yrs & over	6	26	0	-	2	10	1	4	9	12
Total	23	100	5	100	21	100	26	100	75	100

Percentages are rounded and therefore may not add up to 100 per cent.

Table A1.3
Type of death by ethnicity, 2007/08

Ethnicity	Road traffic fatalities		Fatal shootings		Deaths in or following police custody		Deaths during or following other police contact		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
White	17	74	2	40	18	86	24	92	61	81
<i>Of which:</i>										
White British	15	65	1	20	16	76	22	85	54	72
White Irish	2	9	0	-	0	-	0	-	2	3
Any other white background	0	-	1	20	2	10	2	8	5	7
Asian or Asian British	1	4	0	-	0	-	0	-	1	1
<i>Of which:</i>										
Asian Pakistani	1	4	0	-	0	-	0	-	1	1
Black or Black British	3	13	3	60	1	5	0	-	7	9
<i>Of which:</i>										
Black Caribbean	1	4	2	40	0	-	0	-	3	4
Black African	1	4	0	-	0	-	0	-	1	1
Any other black background	1	4	1	20	1	5	0	-	3	4
Mixed race	0	-	0	-	1	5	2	8	3	4
<i>Of which:</i>										
White & Black Caribbean	0	-	0	-	0	-	1	4	1	1
White & Asian	0	-	0	-	1	5	0	-	1	1
Any other mixed background	0	-	0	-	0	-	1	4	1	1
Any other ethnic group	1	4	0	-	1	5	0	-	2	3
<i>Not Known</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>
Total	23	100	5	100	21	100	26	100	75	100

Percentages are rounded and therefore may not add up to 100 per cent.

Table A1.4

Type of death by region and force, 2007/08

Region/Force	Road traffic fatalities	Fatal shootings	Deaths in or following police custody	Deaths during or following other police contact	Total
Central					
Cambridgeshire	0	0	0	2	2
Derbyshire	0	0	0	0	0
Leicestershire	0	0	0	0	0
Lincolnshire	0	0	1	0	1
Norfolk	0	0	0	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	0	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	0	0	0	1	1
Suffolk	0	0	0	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0	0	0	0
West Mercia	0	0	1	1	2
West Midlands	2	0	0	0	2
Central Total	2	0	2	4	8
London & South East					
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	1	1
City of London	0	0	0	0	0
Essex	0	0	0	2	2
Hampshire	0	0	1	2	3
Hertfordshire	1	0	0	1	2
Kent	1	2	1	2	6
Metropolitan	4	3	4	2	13
Surrey	0	0	1	0	1
Sussex	1	0	0	2	3
Thames Valley	1	0	0	1	2
London & South East Total	8	5	7	13	33
Northern					
Cheshire	0	0	2	1	3
Cleveland	0	0	1	0	1
Cumbria	0	0	0	0	0
Durham	0	0	0	1	1
Greater Manchester	2	0	3	1	6
Humberside	3	0	0	0	3
Lancashire	0	0	2	1	3
Merseyside	0	0	1	1	2
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0
Northumbria	0	0	1	0	1
South Yorkshire	0	0	0	1	1
West Yorkshire	0	0	0	3	3
Northern Total	5	0	10	9	24
Wales & South West					
Avon & Somerset	1	0	0	0	1
Devon & Cornwall	2	0	0	0	2
Dorset	0	0	0	0	0
Dyfed-Powys	0	0	0	0	0
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0	0
Gwent	5	0	0	0	5
North Wales	0	0	0	0	0
South Wales	0	0	1	0	1
Wiltshire	0	0	0	0	0
Wales & South West Total	8	0	1	0	9
HMRC	0	0	1	0	1
Total	23	5	21	26	75

Table A1.5

Road traffic incidents by nature of incident, 2004/05 to 2007/08

Road traffic incidents	2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Pursuit related	22	51	27	64	19	54	11	65
Emergency response related	6	14	4	10	3	9	1	6
Other police related	15	35	11	26	13	57	5	29
Total	43	100	42	100	35	100	17	100

Percentages are rounded and therefore may not add up to 100 per cent.

Table A1.6

Deaths in or following police custody by nature of death, 2004/05 to 2007/08

Police involvement	2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Apparent suicide attempt in cell/in transit to station	2	6	1	4	2	7	0	-
Died in custody/on arrest (non-suicide)	7	19	5	18	2	7	2	10
Concern raised or taken ill in custody/on arrest, died in hospital	26	72	22	79	22	81	19	90
Died following release (non-suicide)	1	3	0	-	1	4	0	-
Total	36	100	42	100	27	100	21	100

Percentages are rounded and therefore may not add up to 100 per cent.

Table A1.7

Deaths in or following police custody and deaths during or following other police contact by cause of death, 2006/07 and 2007/08

Cause of death	2006/07		2007/08	
	Deaths in or following police custody	Deaths during or following other police contact	Deaths in or following police custody	Deaths during or following other police contact
Internal/external/multiple Injuries	2	8	1	4
Hanging/asphyxiation/drowning	4	3	1	3
Drug or alcohol overdose/poisoning	3	1	5	1
Stab/gunshot wounds	0	3	0	3
Natural causes/internal organ failure	11	1	7	4
Long-term alcohol/drug misuse	4	1	2	1
Total known causes	24	17	16	16
Awaited/no post mortem	3	3	5	10
Total all	27	20	21	26

Note: There is an increase of two deaths during or following other police contact in 2006/07 compared to the figure given in the report 'Deaths During or Following Police Contact: Statistics for England and Wales 2006/07'. This is because two deaths were added after the publication of the report.

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