

**VIOLENT CRIME IN GHANA: WHO IS AT RISK, WHEN AND WHERE?
ANALYSIS OF POLICE CRIME STATISTICS**

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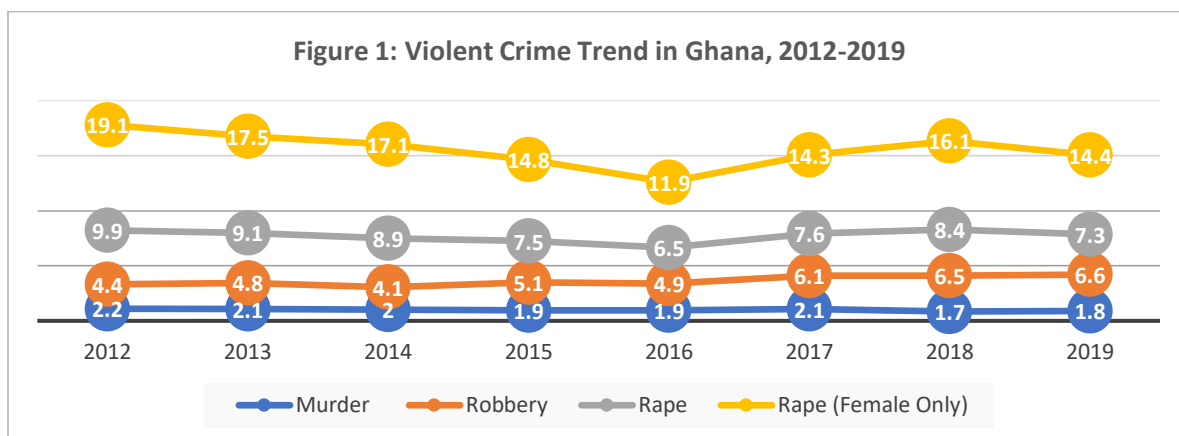
ABSTRACT

What does police statistics tell us about violent crime in Ghana? In this research brief, we analyse police data on violent crime trends, who is at most risk, when and where. The results show stability in violent crime over time and across regions. Child and adult rape represent the highest form of violence according to police statistics. The risk of sexual violence is about three times more than robbery. There is regional variation in the incidence of violence in Ghana. Residents of Greater Accra and Central region are at disproportionate risk of robbery and sexual violence. Alternative measure of crime is needed to complement police crime statistics to better address the crime problem in Ghana

Violent crime remains the most feared crime. Crimes of violence are not only a threat to life; they also tend to have significant political and economic consequences as well as public health implications. Countries that seek to create conditions for socio-economic development need to address the problem of violence. Not surprisingly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a commitment to prevent fear and violence. However, tackling violence requires accurate data and careful analysis of that data to establish trends, at-risk individuals and groups, and when and where violence happens. Knowledge from such an analysis can aid the judicious use of police resources and the development of effective crime prevention strategies to reduce harm and increase public safety.

In Ghana, police statistics remain the main source of crime data. The police classification of crimes includes a category they describe as ‘major crimes’; namely murder, robbery and sexual violence (i.e., child and adult rape). The analysis presented in this research brief focuses on these three crimes. We focus on the *rates* of violent crime by controlling for population variations over time and between places. To compute a violent crime rate, we divide the reported cases of the violent crime by the relevant population of people for the year, region or specific gender (e.g., female population). The result is multiplied by 100,000 to arrive at a standardised figure which can be compared across the relevant indicators.

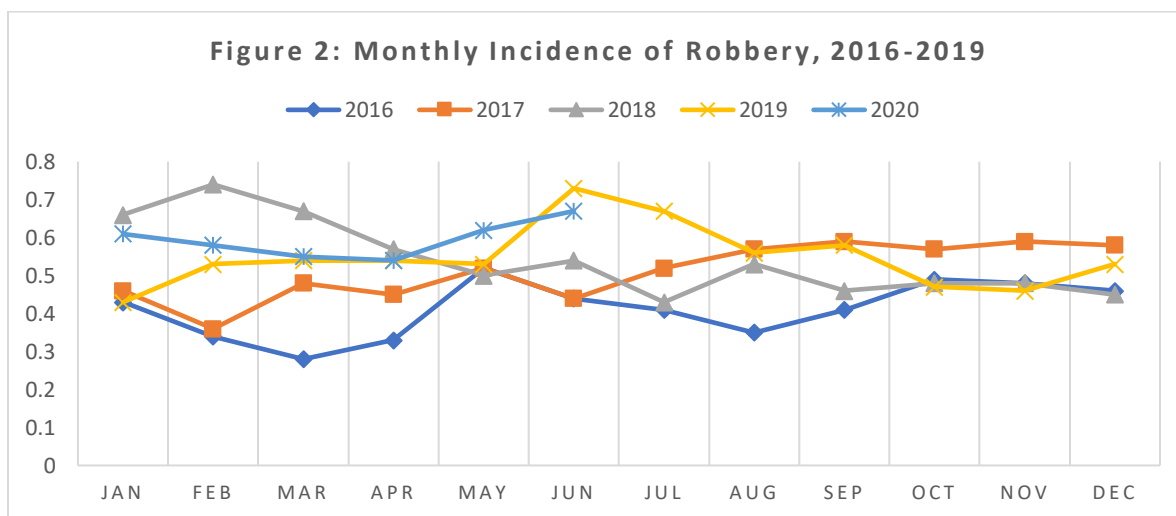
Figure 1 shows trends for murder, robbery and rape from 2012-2019. As can be seen, violent crimes have remained relatively stable over time. The murder rates have been stable around 2 per 100,000 population over the 8-year period. This means for every 100,000 people in Ghana 2 are victims of murder every year. To put this in perspective, Singapore and Japan had murder rates of 0.2 per 100,000 population in 2019 while the United Kingdom reported a rate of 1.2 per 100,000 population. However, Ghana’s murder rate is comparable to Malaysia’s 2 per 100,000 and lower than that for Kenya (5 per 100,000) or Nigeria (9.45 per 100,000). It has the lowest murder rate in the subregion.



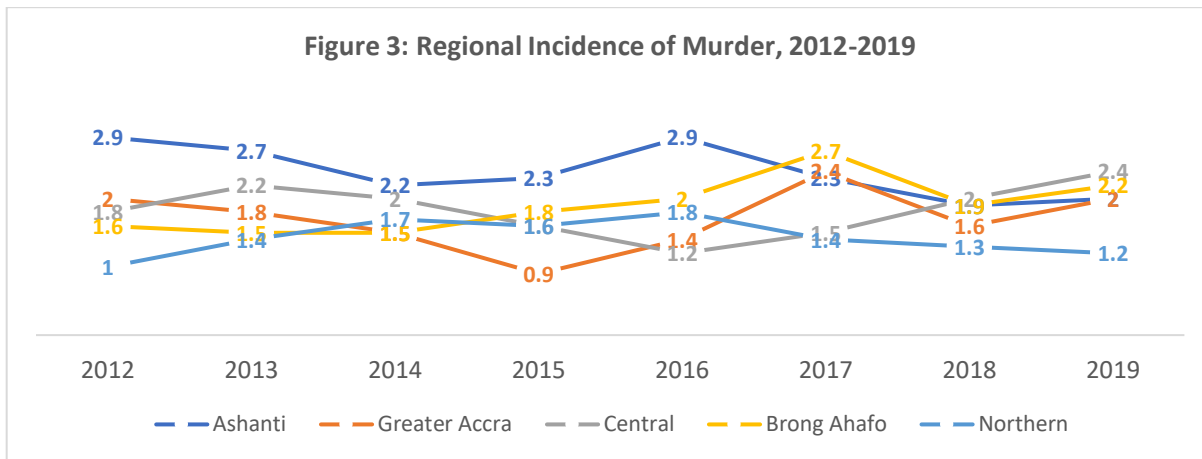
Robbery rates have increased from 4.9 per 100,000 population in 2016 to 6.6 per 100,000 population in 2019. The 2019 rate was the highest in the last eight years. However, of the three violent crimes analysed, the results for rape are the most striking: whether using the general population or the female population, Ghanaians have been at a far greater

risk of rape than they have been of murder or robbery. For the general population, the rate has fluctuated between 6 and 10 per 100,000 with the lowest rate (6.5 per 100,000 population) recorded in 2016. In relation to the female population, the rate of rape is four times the robbery rate in 2012; it was 2.4 times the robbery rate in 2016 and 2.2 times the 2019 robbery rate. For various reasons – such as shame and attitudes of police officers – rape victims are known globally to be reluctant to report their victimisation to the police. Thus, the results reported here are likely to be a tip of the iceberg of actual incidents of rape in Ghana.

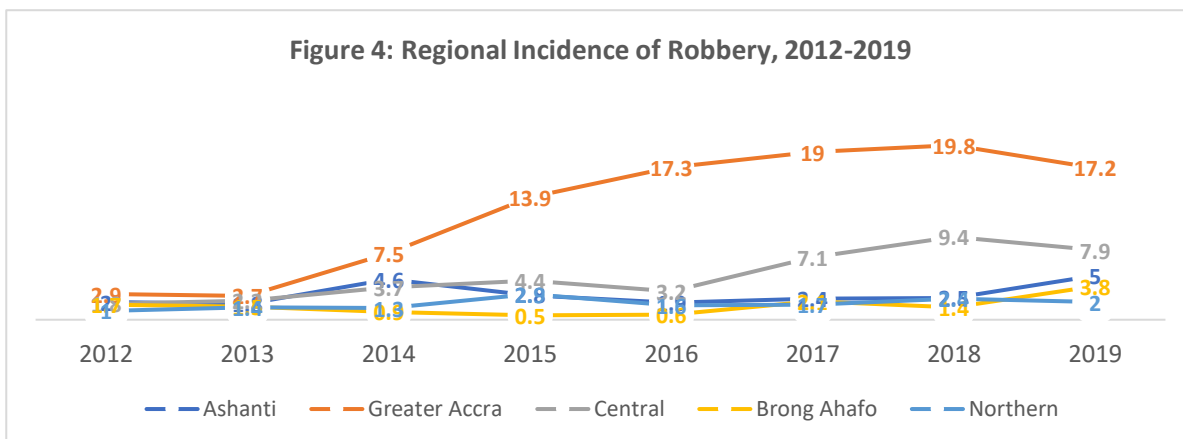
While annual rates of violence are useful, they do not provide information on monthly, weekly or daily variations. However, such information is required to determine the *hot times* of violent incidents. Understanding hot times for violent crimes will help police officers target resources and responses not only at where a violent crime occurs but also when. Unfortunately, with the exception of monthly distribution for robbery, published police data do not provide such fine details. Figure 2 shows relatively stable trend in the monthly incidents of robbery over the past 5 years. Interestingly, it seems that the partial lockdown in March and April, and general restriction in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, did not have noticeable impact on robbery incidents. How far this may be true for other violent crimes such as murder and rape remain a moot point.



In addition to hot times, there is great advantage in establishing *hot spots* of violence; that is, places *where* violent crimes tend to occur. Here again, the police data are limited to regional distribution of violence. Our analysis focused on five regions: Ashanti; Brong Ahafo (Bono, Bono East and Ahafo); Central; Greater Accra (combines police regions of Accra and Tema); and Northern Region (North East, Northern and Savannah). As shown in Figure 3 below, we found regional variations in the murder rates: Ashanti Region recorded the highest murder rates between 2012 and 2016. Brong Ahafo recorded the highest murder rate in 2017, followed by Greater Accra and Ashanti. All regions witnessed a decline in the murder rates in 2018 but the rates increased to 2 or more per 100,000 population in 2019 for all the selected regions except the Northern region. The region has consistently recorded murder rates below the national rate of approximately 2 per 100,000 population since 2012, with its lowest rate of 0.9 being recorded in 2015.

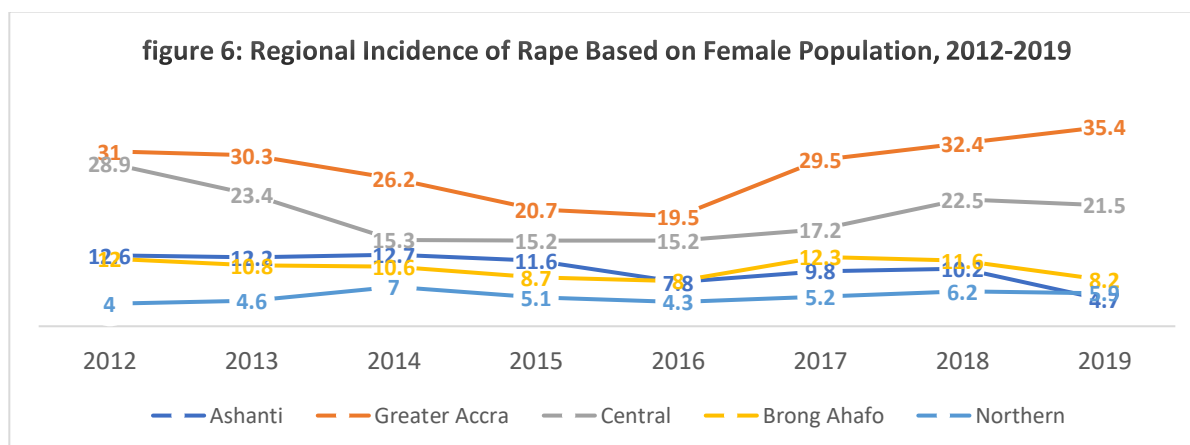
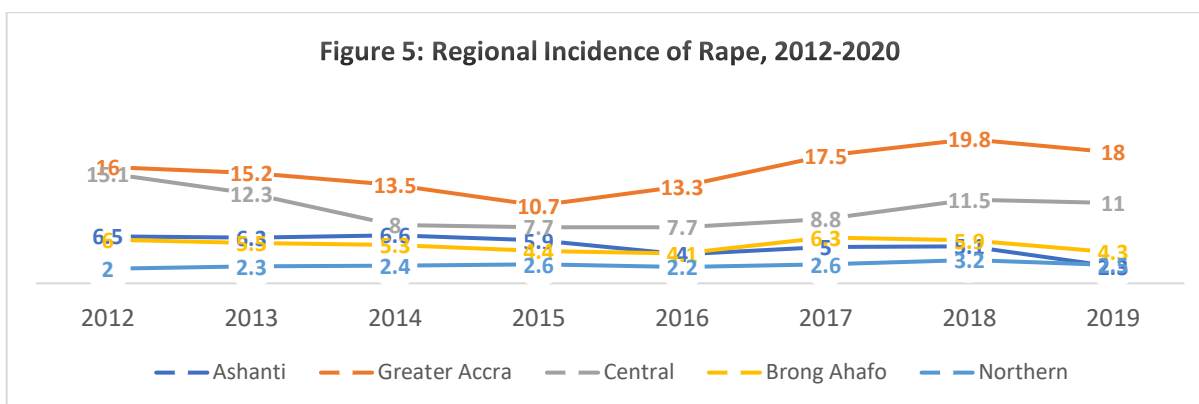


Next, we examined regional distribution of robbery. Figure 4 shows the Greater Accra region is a *hot spot* of robbery. It is the only region that has consistently recorded double-digit figures for robbery rates since 2015. The highest rate was 19.8 per 100,000 population in 2018. This means for every 100,000 people in Accra and Tema, approximately 20 were victims of robbery in 2018. This represents an increase of 2.6 times the robbery rate for 2014. However, the 2019 rate of 17.2 per 100,000 represents a decline of 13% on the 2018 rate. Another noteworthy finding concerned the robbery rates for Central region: between 2016 and 2017, robbery rates increased by 121.9%, from 3.2 per 100,000 population to 7.1 per 100,000 people in the region. As at 2019, the robbery rate was at 7.9 per 100,000 people in the region.



Finally, we computed regional distributions for sexual violence. Whether we used the overall population or the female population as the denominator, the Greater Accra region emerged as a hot spot of rape. The incident of rape in that region rose sharply from 19.5 per 100,000 female population in 2016 to 29.5 in 2017 and reached 35.4 per 100,000 female population in 2019. In other words, for every 100,000 female residents of the Greater Accra region in 2019, 35 reported to the police that they had been raped. The rate of 35.4 is 7.5 times the rate for Ashanti region and 6 times that for Northern region. The Central region consistently recorded the second highest rates of rape incidence with the Northern region recording the lowest rate among the five selected regions.





We conclude this Research Brief with two thoughts. First, our analysis of police statistics revealed females are at a disproportionate risk of violent crime in Ghana. Our attempt at analyses of *hot spots* and *hot times* of violent crimes in Ghana were limited to yearly and regional levels. There are regional variations in violent crime with the Greater Accra emerging as a *hot spot* for robbery and rape, followed by Central. Nationally, we found relative stability in violent crime over time. While the findings are interesting, they are not sufficiently detailed because of data constraint. Hot-spot analyses of violence require geocoded crime data on the specific spot or address that a crime occurred. This could be a street segment, a home, a farm or a commercial property. Thus, although Greater Accra Region had the highest concentration of robbery and rape offences, targeting police resources more effectively and efficiently would require information on the specific locations within the region where such offences occurred.

Second, official crime statistics do not capture the entire volume of crime incidents. The reasons are multifaceted: victims sometimes choose not to report their victimisation to the police either because they lack confidence in the police to investigate crimes or they believe the crime is better resolved through alternative means. This is especially true for rape, which is known to be the least likely of violent crimes to be reported to the police. Data accuracy and quality are also affected by variations in institutional cultures and practices between and within police regional commands over time. This hinders attempt to determine how far the findings reported above reflect the true incident of violence rather than variations in police operational activities and efficiencies. Although police data are a useful starting point, a fuller and more accurate measure of violent crimes in Ghana requires complementary data sources. We recommend a national victimisation survey. Data from such a survey can help the police and government develop targeted and effective strategies to reduce violent crimes.