

DISSECTING THE HEADLINES: ETHNIC DISPROPORTIONALITY IN CHILD ARRESTS BY THE METROPOLITAN POLICE

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Introduction

In the context of the government's ongoing Racial Disparity Audit¹, the Howard League recently published data on arrests of children (aged 10 to 17), examining the relationship between the proportion of those who were BAME (black, Asian or minority ethnic) and the ethnic composition of the wider population, on a force-by-force basis.² This included the Metropolitan Police, where the finding that 60 per cent of child arrests in 2016 were BAME was contrasted with the fact that London's overall population is 40 per cent BAME (as at 2011). The ethnic profile of the total population was used due to 'a lack of population data specifically in relation to boys and girls aged 10 to 17', which the Howard League conceded 'makes it difficult to assess whether forces are making a disproportionately high number of BAME child arrests'.

In the case of London, however, very detailed demographic data *are* readily available, in the form of population projections published and periodically

refreshed by the Greater London Authority (GLA).³ This includes population data broken down by borough, sex, ethnicity and single year of age on an annual basis over an extended period.⁴ I have previously used an earlier iteration of these data to examine ethnic disproportionality in the policing of cannabis possession, in combination with incident-level police data.⁵

In this paper I am going to use those detailed demographic data to examine ethnic disproportionality in child arrests in London. In doing so, I will include links to the data sources, describe my methods, provide tables of key data, and highlight the most important findings. I hope this analysis will prove useful, both to inform debates about the use of arrest powers in London, but also for anyone interested in the question of ethnic disproportionality as it relates to policing and crime (but also other areas of public policy).

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/race-disparity-audit>
2 <http://howardleague.org/news/howard-league-publishes-ethnicity-analysis-of-child-arrests-following-the-lammy-review/>

3 <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/projections>
4 [https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/projections/2017-11-24T14:07:27.18/2016-based%20ethnic%20group%20projections%20\(housing-led\).xlsx](https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/projections/2017-11-24T14:07:27.18/2016-based%20ethnic%20group%20projections%20(housing-led).xlsx)
5 <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/Policing-Cannabis-London-Redacted.pdf>

The demographics of London

In considering the question of ethnic disproportionality, we must first understand the demographics of the populations that are of interest to us. In this regard the two charts below (Figures 1 and 2), produced using GLA data, tell us a great deal. Notably, that younger Londoners are less white than their older peers and that London's different ethnic groups have very different

age structures. If we are concerned with arrests of 10- to 17-year olds, then we need also to be concerned specifically with the demographics of the population of 10- to 17-year olds at the relevant time. Relying on the ethnic profile of all Londoners is not appropriate, particularly if it can be avoided, and the 2011 population profile is growing increasingly out of date.

Figure 1: The ethnic composition of London in 2017 by age

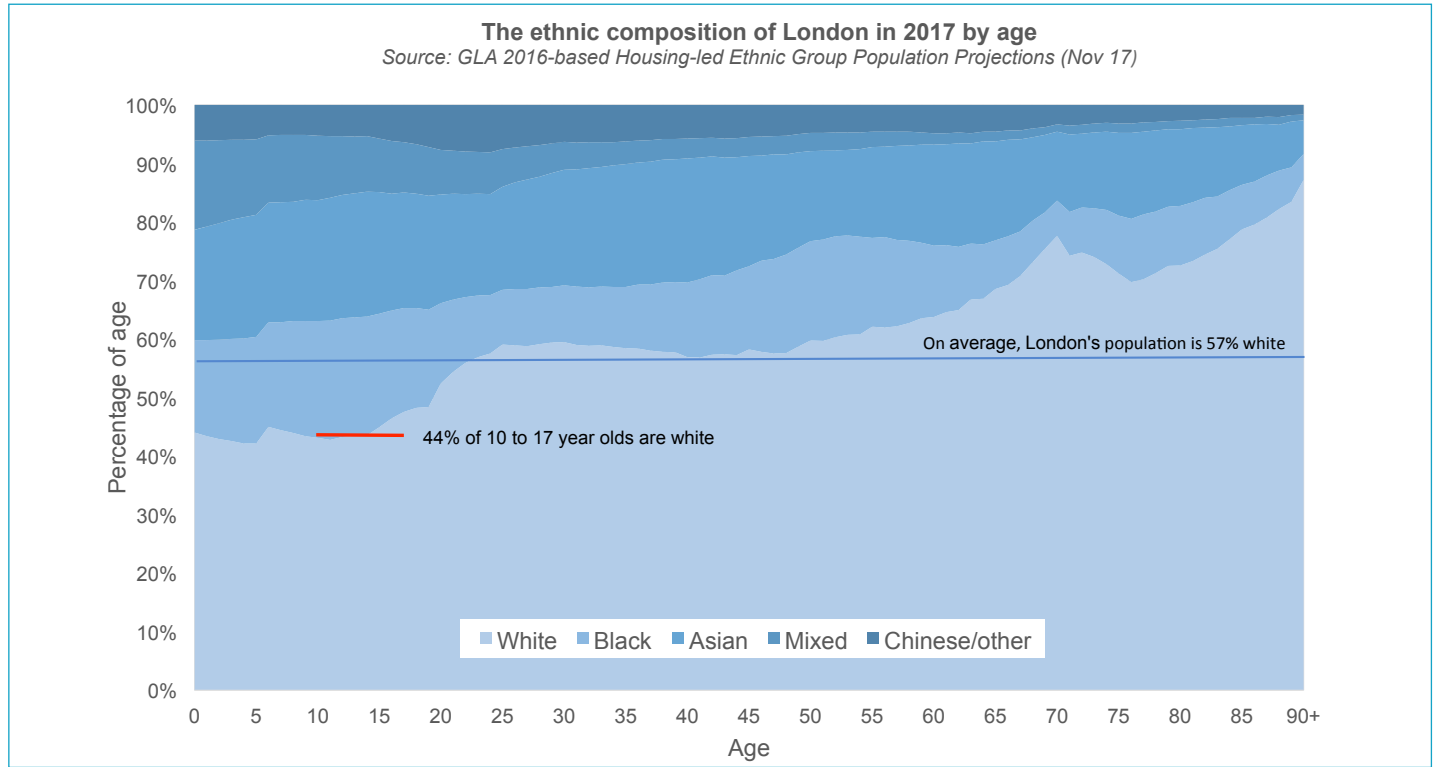
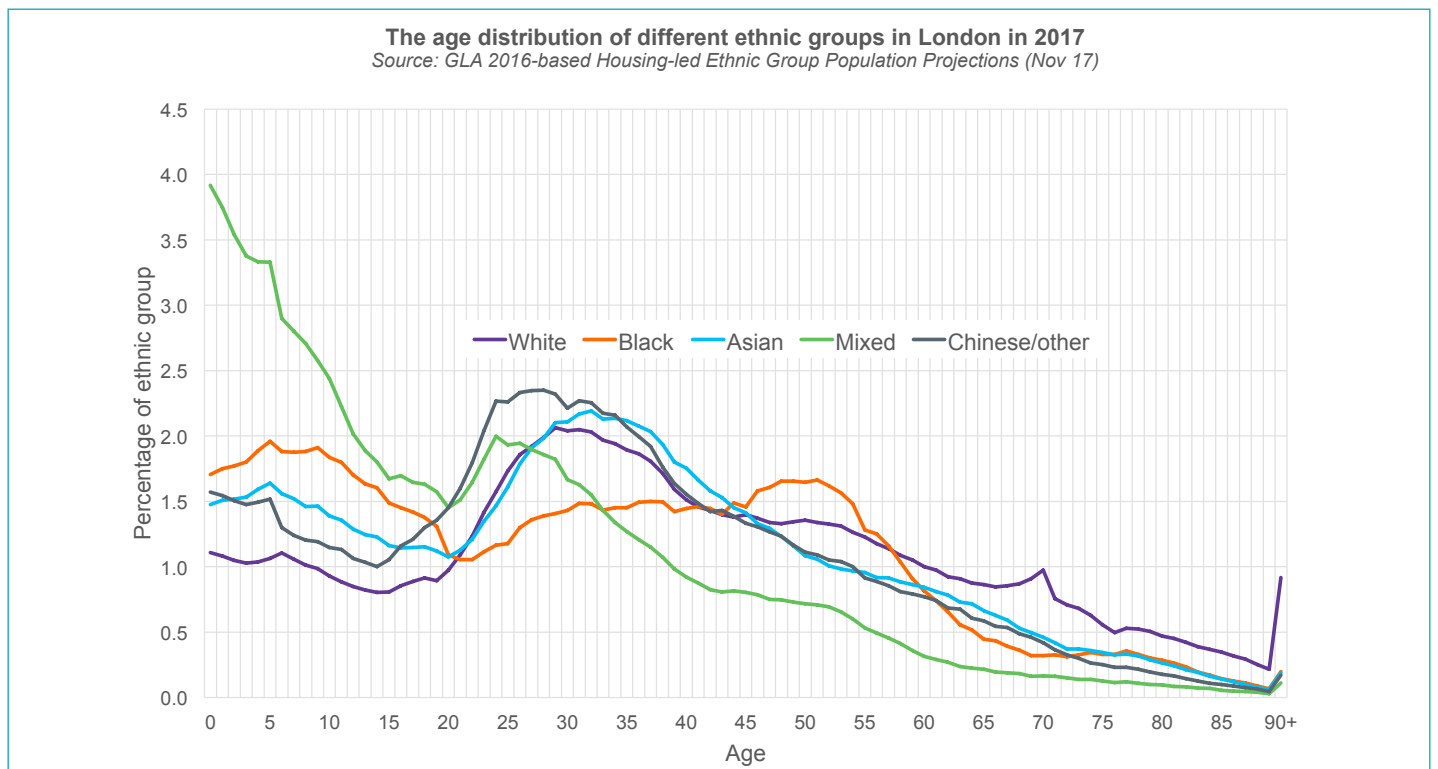


Figure 2: The age distribution of different ethnic groups in London in 2017



Arrest data

The Home Office publishes data on arrests by police forces in England and Wales that allow us to examine a range of variables including the number of arrests by police force, sex, (grouped) age, (grouped) ethnicity and the reason for arrest.⁶ At the time of writing the published data are available annually from 2006/07 to 2016/17. I have chosen to examine the period from 2010/11 (and therefore the time of the last Census), so we can look at how arrests have changed over time.

Looking specifically at the 10 to 17-year olds arrested in London, we see that around 85 per cent of those arrested are boys (in 2016/17 boys accounted for 15,356 arrests out of a total of 18,068 for that age group). Bearing that in mind, I have split my analysis into boys and girls – and we will see that there are some interesting differences between the two. Let's start with some basic data on the number of arrests by year and self-defined ethnicity.

Table 1: Boys aged 10-17 arrested by the MPS, by self-defined ethnicity

Arrest Totals – Boys	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Asian	3710	3031	2373	2207	1821	1841	1440
Black	13418	11305	8133	6936	6257	6594	6000
Chinese/other	834	758	627	561	479	459	510
Mixed	3409	3270	2478	2182	2039	2061	1619
White	13512	11101	8771	7996	7316	7042	5511
Not stated	431	352	274	239	267	323	276
Total	35314	29817	22656	20121	18179	18320	15356

Table 2: Girls aged 10-17 arrested by the MPS, by self-defined ethnicity

Arrest Totals – Girls	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Asian	361	296	213	187	185	164	132
Black	1932	1376	1020	998	921	794	838
Chinese/other	163	163	101	86	93	70	85
Mixed	794	612	465	416	420	377	383
White	3375	2625	1816	1817	1580	1604	1201
Not stated	125	105	93	80	64	95	73
Total	6750	5177	3708	3584	3263	3104	2712

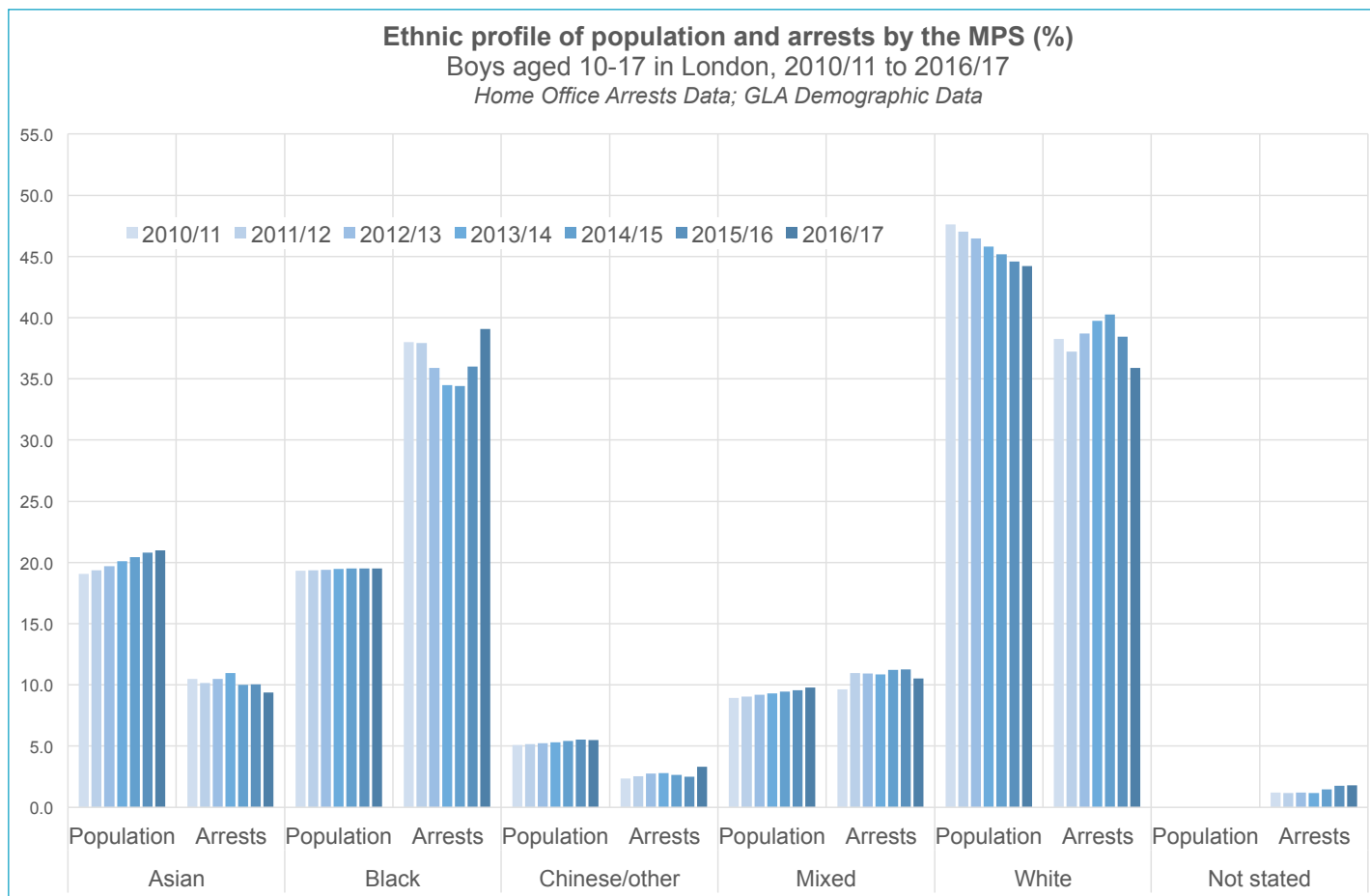
The first thing that is apparent is that the total number of arrests has fallen considerably over the seven-year period, having fallen 56 per cent for boys and 60 per cent for girls. Looking at the most recent year, we can see that, respectively, black boys and white girls were most often arrested.

⁶ The ethnic groupings and their relationship to the demographic data are shown in *Appendix B*. The arrest data are available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/654470/arrests-open-data-tables-ppp.ods

Combining arrest and demographic data

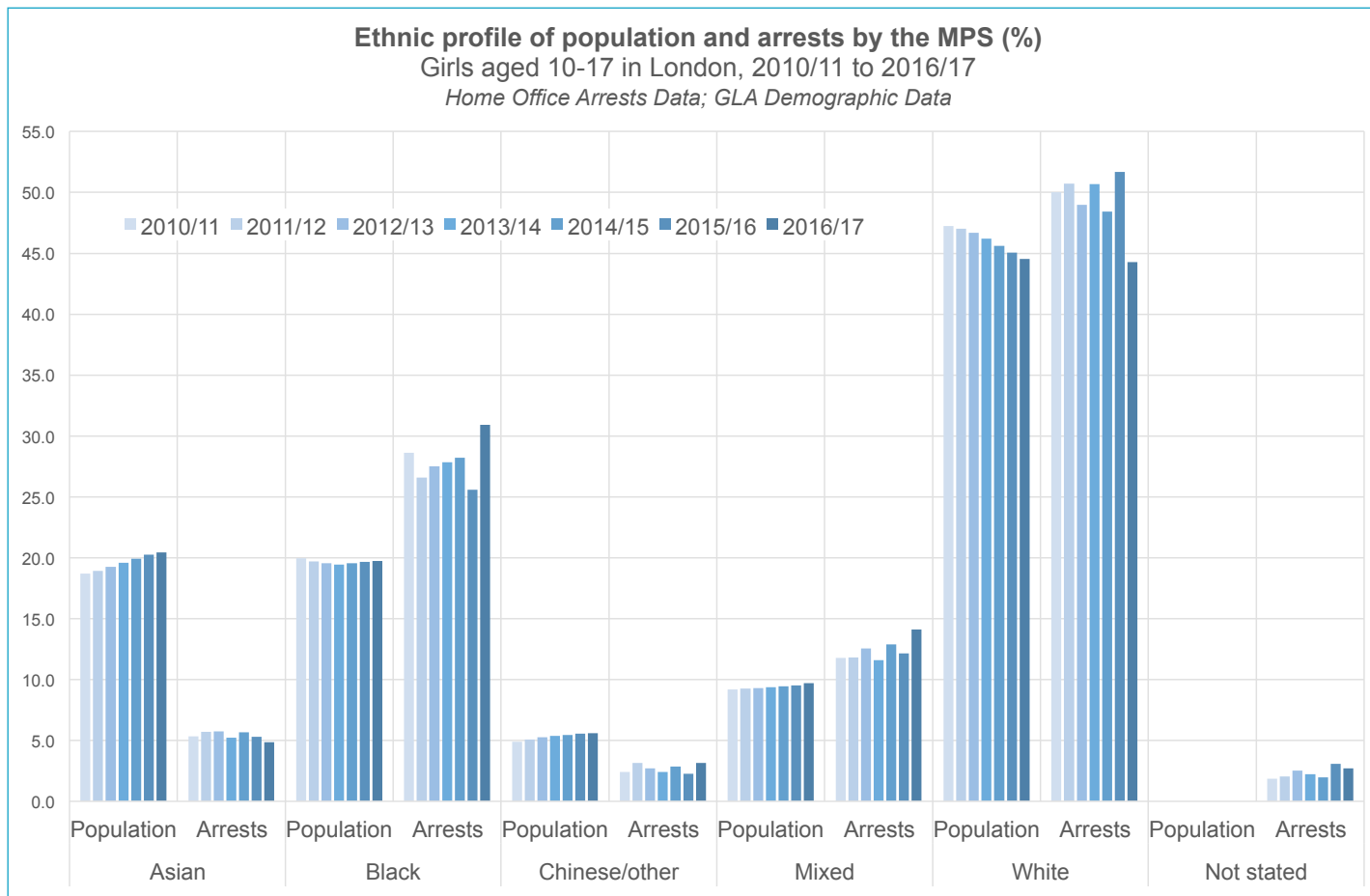
We can now chart each of the main ethnic groups to show what proportion of the population, and of arrests, they accounted for over the period from 2010/11 to 2016/17, using the demographic and arrests data. I have used the 2011 demographic data alongside the 2010/11 crime data, the 2012 demographic data with the 2011/12 crime data, and so on.

Figure 3: Ethnic profile of population and arrests of boys by the MPS, 2010/11 to 2016/17



In the case of the boys we can see that, as a proportion of boys aged 10 to 17, Asians, mixed-ethnicity and to a lesser extent Chinese/other groups have been increasing over the seven-year period, black groups have remained stable, and white have been falling. We can also see clear disproportionality with black boys comprising a much larger proportion of arrests than they do of the population, while for Asian boys, Chinese/other and to a lesser extent white the opposite is apparent.

Figure 4: Ethnic profile of population and arrests of girls by the MPS, 2010/11 to 2016/17

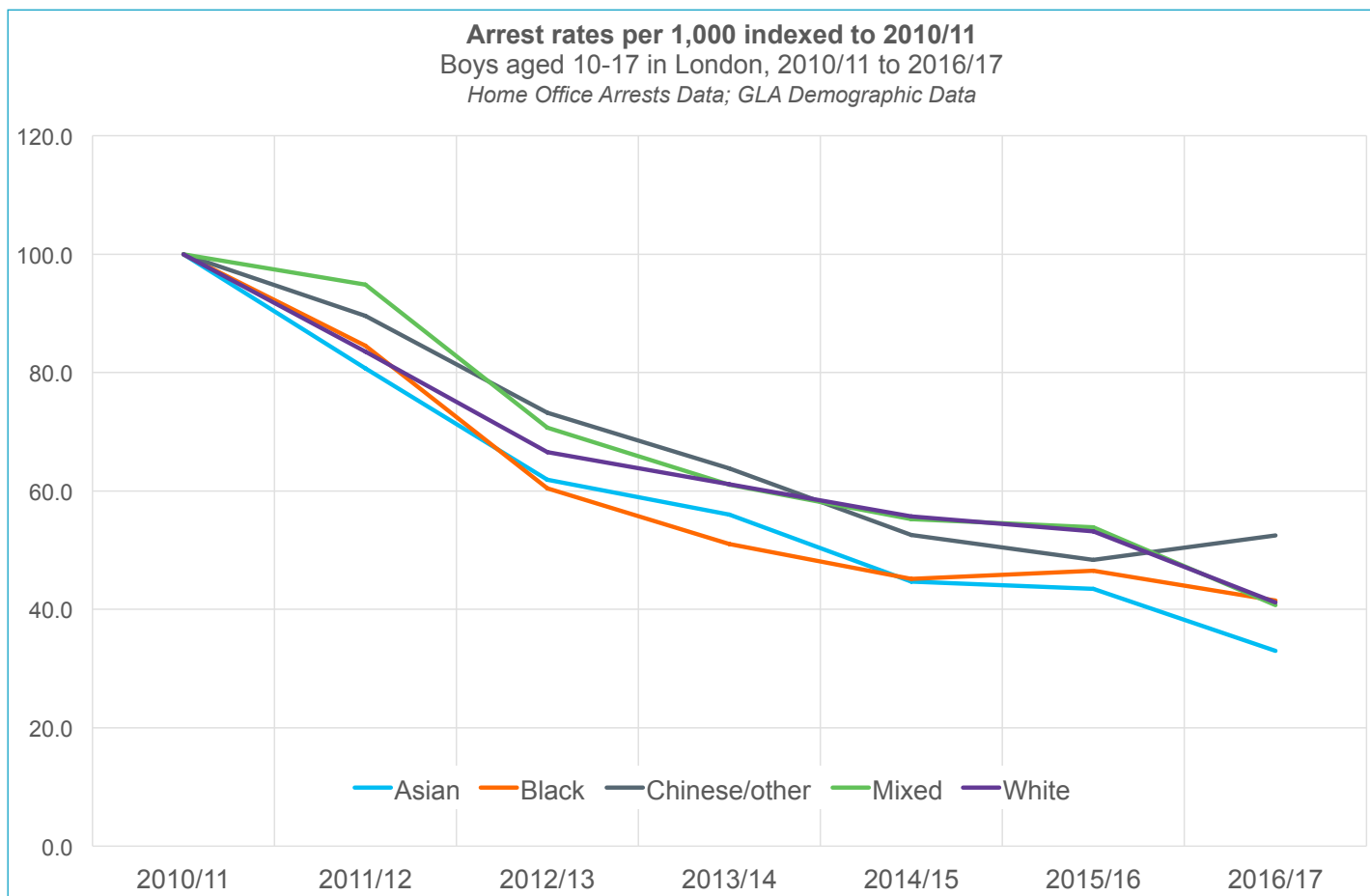


Unsurprisingly, the same pattern of population change is seen for the girls. The degree to which black girls are disproportionately arrested is seen to be much lower than for black boys, and it appears Asian girls are even less likely than Asian boys to be arrested relative to their presence in the population. We will look at the question of disproportionality in more detail below.

Changes to arrest rates by ethnicity over time

We can examine how arrest rates have changed over time by indexing the arrest rates (per 1,000) for each ethnic group to 2010/11.⁷ We do this by using the specific population and arrest counts for 10 to 17-year olds for each ethnic group for each year – as before, separately for boys and girls.

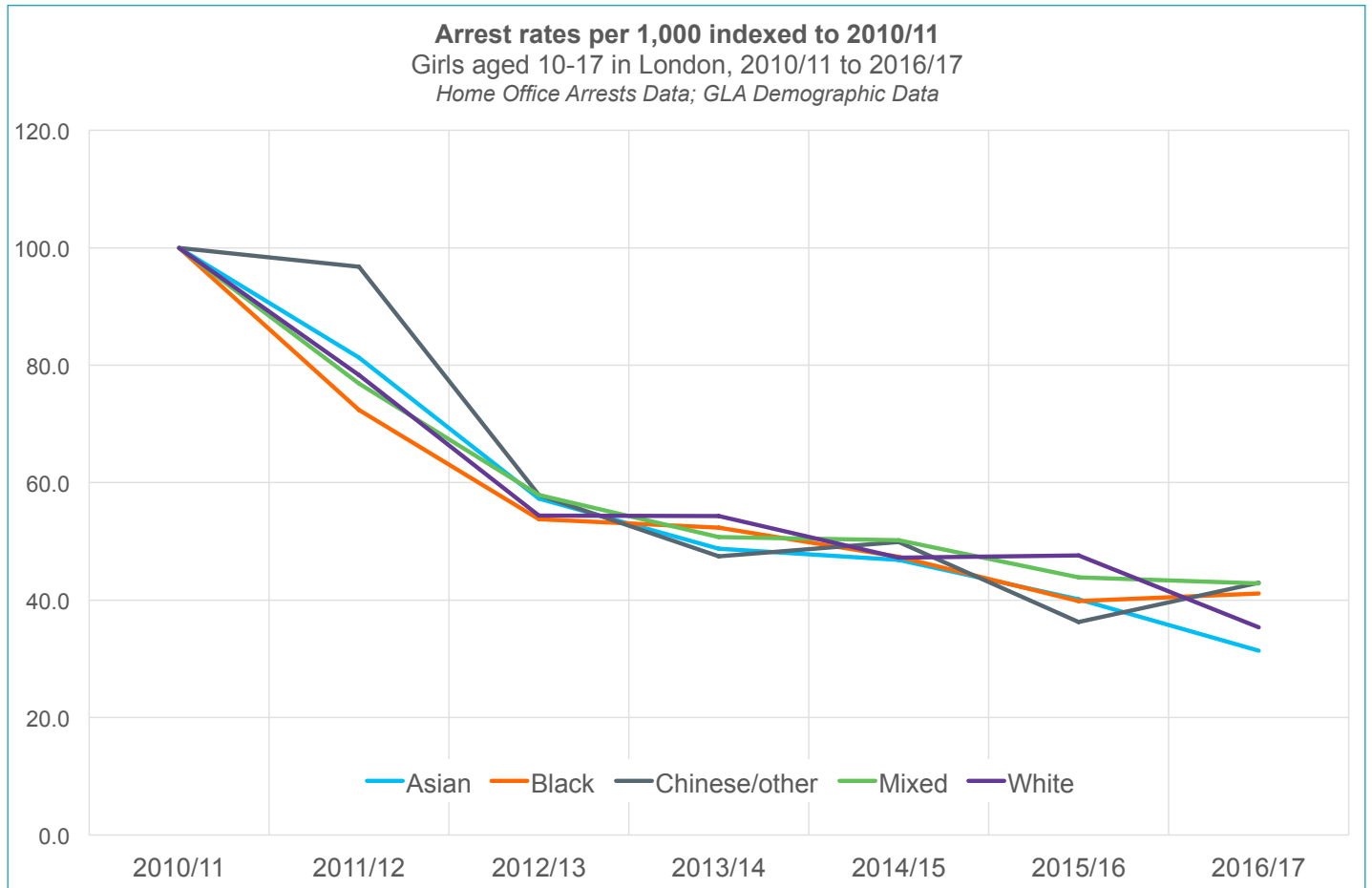
Figure 5: Arrests per 1,000 boys by ethnicity, indexed to 2010/11



In the case of the boys, we can see that while arrests of black boys fell before those of white boys, the two eventually converged in 2016/17. Arrests of Asian boys had relatively fallen most overall by 2016/17, while those of Chinese and other ethnicities had fallen least.

⁷ Arrests where the ethnicity was 'not stated' have necessarily been excluded from the analysis.

Figure 6: Arrests per 1,000 girls by ethnicity, indexed to 2010/11

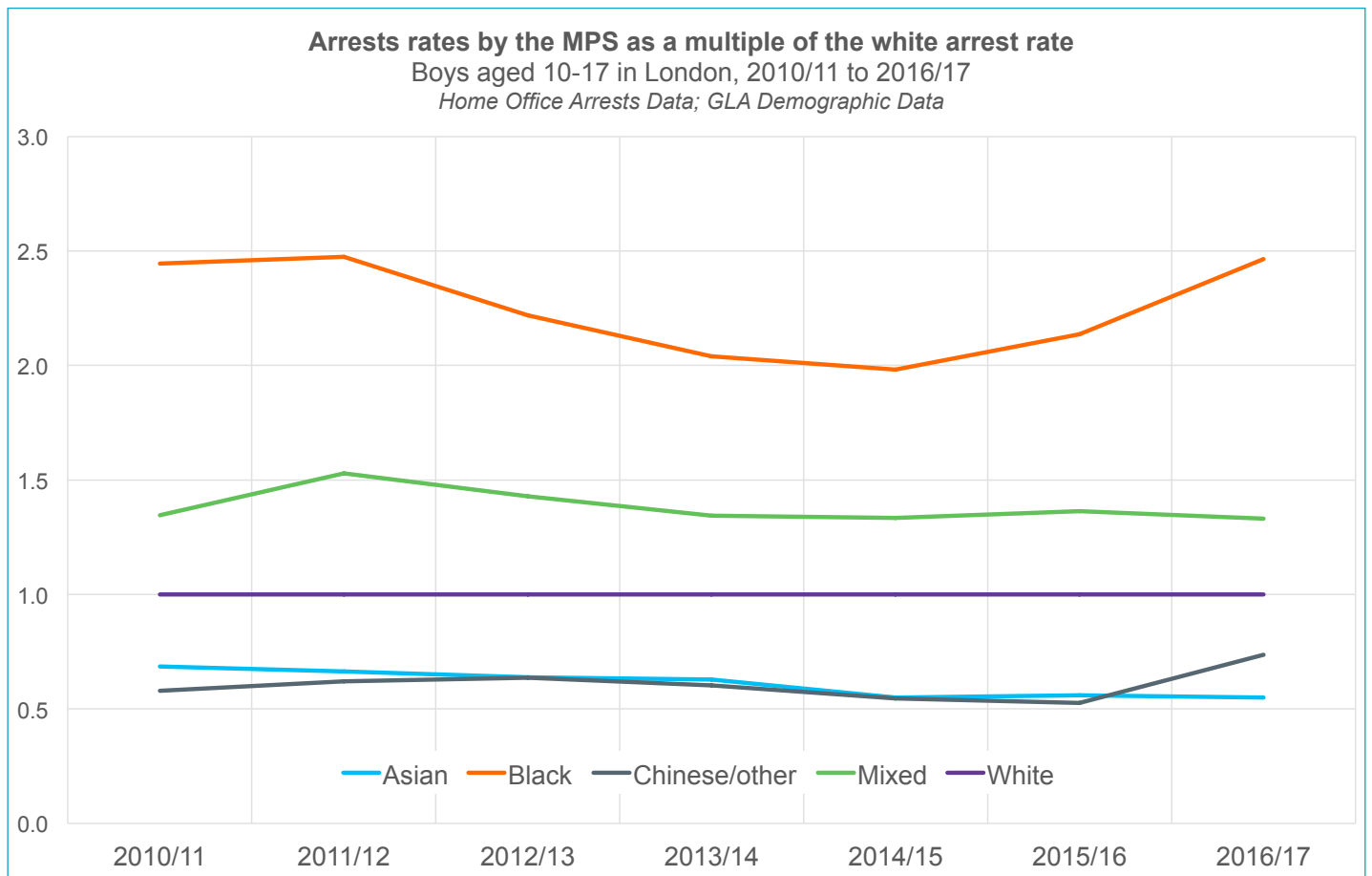


In contrast to the boys, the different ethnic groups of girls followed a rather more consistent pattern, with the Chinese/other arrest rate initially falling more slowly than the others. By 2016/17, the Asian arrest rate had fallen most relative to 2010/11, followed by white, with black, mixed ethnicity and Chinese/other ending up relatively higher.

Ethnic disproportionality

To examine the question of disproportionality in more detail, we can calculate the arrest rate (per 1,000 population) for each ethnic group, for both boys and girls, and then see how those rates compare to the respective white arrest rates, including how they have varied over time. That gives us a set of very specific disproportionality ratios, which are charted here (and detailed in table form in *Appendix Tables C4 and D4*).

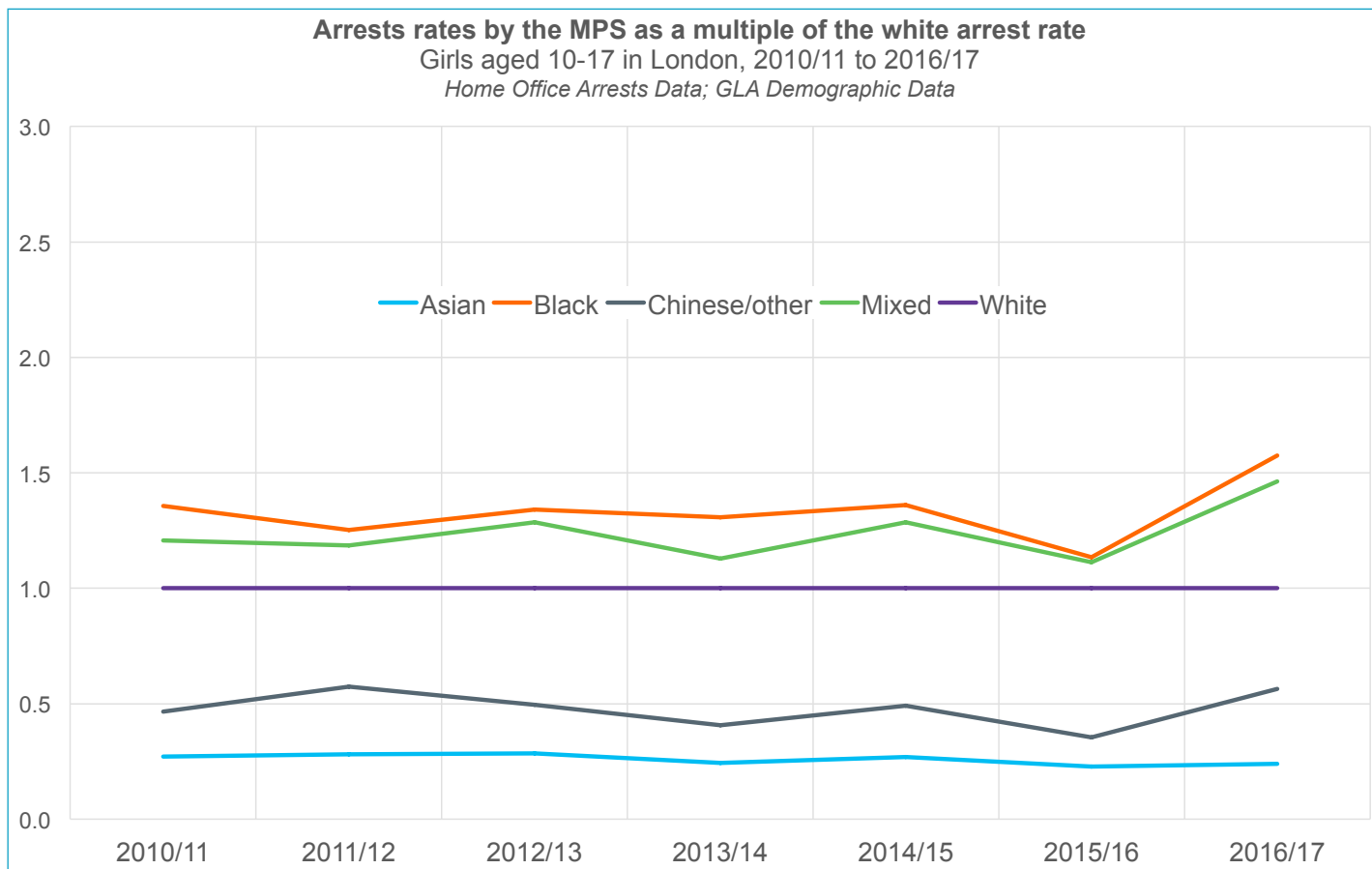
Figure 7: Disproportionality rates for ethnic groups of boys relative to white boys



In the case of the boys, we can see that black boys were arrested at 2.0 to 2.5 times the white rate, while for mixed race boys it was 1.3 to 1.5 times. Asian and Chinese/other ethnic groups were arrested at much lower rates than white boys, around 0.5 to 0.7 times the white rate.

The curve in the line showing how the disproportionality rate varied for black boys reflects the way that their arrest rate fell before the white arrest rate, but then two then converged again in the most recent year, as shown in *Figure 5*.

Figure 8: Disproportionality rates for ethnic groups of girls relative to white girls



In contrast to the boys, we can see that black and mixed ethnicity girls were arrested at a similar rate, around 1.1 to 1.6 times the rate for white girls. Chinese/other ethnic groups were arrested at roughly half the rate of white girls (0.4 to 0.6 times), while Asian girls were arrested at only one quarter of the white rate (0.2 to 0.3 times).

We can see, therefore, that while black boys are arrested at an especially high rate, including relative to their mixed ethnicity peers, for girls this is less evident and black and mixed ethnicity girls are arrested at a similar rate relative to their white peers.

Ethnic disproportionality by reasons for arrest

The final detail we can examine using the Home Office arrests data is the reasons why children were arrested. Here some important differences can be seen in the disproportionality ratios, that is the arrest rates per 1,000 children as a multiple of the white rate.

Table 3: Disproportionality of arrests of boys by ethnicity and reason for arrest (2016/17)

Multiple of the white arrest rate – Boys	Asian	Black	Chinese/ other	Mixed	White
Criminal damage and arson	0.4	1.3	0.4	1.0	1.0
Drug offences	0.8	2.5	0.9	1.4	1.0
Fraud offences	0.7	2.4	0.9	0.6	1.0
Misc crimes against society	0.7	2.4	1.0	1.5	1.0
Possession of weapons offences	0.7	5.4	0.9	2.2	1.0
Public order offences	0.5	2.5	0.6	1.3	1.0
Robbery	0.7	5.7	0.9	2.5	1.0
Sexual offences	0.6	2.9	0.9	1.0	1.0
Theft offences	0.3	1.6	0.6	1.1	1.0
Violence against the person	0.6	2.3	0.7	1.3	1.0
Total	0.5	2.5	0.7	1.3	1.0

We had already seen that overall black boys were arrested at 2.5 times the rate of their white peers, but here we can see that the disproportionality rate also varies by ‘reason for arrest’, for black boys being especially high for possession of weapons and robbery (which also show higher levels of disproportionality for mixed ethnicity boys).

Table 4: Disproportionality of arrests of girls by ethnicity and reason for arrest (2016/17)

Multiple of the white arrest rate – Girls	Asian	Black	Chinese/ other	Mixed	White
Criminal damage and arson	0.2	1.4	0.4	2.3	1.0
Drug offences	0.3	1.0	0.7	1.3	1.0
Fraud offences	0.5	1.5	1.7	1.3	1.0
Misc crimes against society	0.3	1.7	0.1	2.1	1.0
Possession of weapons offences	0.4	2.0	0.7	1.8	1.0
Public order offences	0.4	2.8	1.2	2.0	1.0
Robbery	0.1	2.7	0.2	1.3	1.0
Sexual offences	0.7	3.0	8.0	0.0	1.0
Theft offences	0.2	1.3	0.6	0.8	1.0
Violence against the person	0.2	1.6	0.5	1.7	1.0
Total	0.2	1.6	0.6	1.5	1.0

In the case of the girls, we need to be mindful of some very small numbers sitting behind these disproportionality ratios – for example only 11 girls were arrested for sexual offences in 2016/17 (see *Appendix table D5*). However, as with the boys we see that black girls are arrested for robbery, but also public order, at a particularly high rate relative to all other ethnic groups.

Concluding remarks

In the case of London, we are fortunate to have detailed demographic projections that bridge the gaps between Censuses, and give us the basis for nuanced analysis of ethnic disproportionality. In the present case, that means we can calculate very specific arrest rates by gender, age, ethnicity and year, and in doing so uncover important detail. If the arrest data could be broken down further, by single year of age and ungrouped self-defined ethnicity, then the analysis could be conducted at an even more granular level of detail.⁸

When the Howard League inferred that 60 per cent of child arrests by the MPS in 2016 being BAME compared unfavourably with only 40 per cent of London's population being BAME, their analysis fell short in two ways. First, they didn't compare the ethnic profile of arrests of children with the ethnic profile of children, but with the total population. As it happens, we have seen that around 56 per cent of 10 to 17-year olds are BAME, which might suggest that the profile of arrests does not indicate disproportionality. But that is because of the second shortcoming, which is to have lumped all BAME groups together, masking the differences between them. In particular, we have seen above that black boys are arrested at a particularly high rate, and that both black and mixed-race boys and girls are arrested far more often than their white and especially their Asian peers, relative to their representation in the population.

Inevitably, those findings merely beg a further series of questions about the mechanisms that might be responsible for these apparent differences. At least now we can hopefully be a bit more specific in deciding which questions need answering.

⁸ The published Home Office data only includes grouped ages and ethnicities, but more detailed data could be obtained from the Metropolitan Police.

Appendix A: Sources

Arrests

Home Office Arrest Open Data Tables (October 2017)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/654470/arrests-open-data-tables-ppp.ods

Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-powers-and-procedures-england-and-wales-year-ending-31-march-2017>

Demographics

GLA 2016-based Housing-led Ethnic Group

Population Projections (November 2017) [https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/projections/2017-11-24T14:07:27.18/2016-based%20ethnic%20group%20projections%20\(housing-led\).xlsx](https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/projections/2017-11-24T14:07:27.18/2016-based%20ethnic%20group%20projections%20(housing-led).xlsx)

Available at <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/projections>

Appendix B: Ethnic Groupings

While the GLA demographic data use 17 ethnic categories, the published Home Office arrest data use only five. The relationship between these used for the analysis in this paper is as follows.

White British White Irish Other White	White
Black African Black Caribbean Other Black	Black
Bangladeshi Indian Pakistani Other Asian	Asian
White & Asian White & Black African White & Black Caribbean Other Mixed	Mixed
Chinese Arab Other Ethnic Group	Chinese/other

Appendix C: Tables – Boys aged 10-17

C1

Population Totals – Boys	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Asian	71782	72664	74180	76240	78801	81988	84467
Black	72836	72608	73052	73796	75178	76974	78509
Chinese/other	19140	19420	19653	20185	20922	21800	22312
Mixed	33595	33965	34565	35228	36387	37699	39214
White	179323	176403	174809	173627	174224	175692	177676
Total	376676	375060	376259	379076	385512	394153	402178

C2

Arrest Totals – Boys	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Asian	3710	3031	2373	2207	1821	1841	1440
Black	13418	11305	8133	6936	6257	6594	6000
Chinese/other	834	758	627	561	479	459	510
Mixed	3409	3270	2478	2182	2039	2061	1619
White	13512	11101	8771	7996	7316	7042	5511
Not stated	431	352	274	239	267	323	276
Total	35314	29817	22656	20121	18179	18320	15356

C3

Arrest rate per 1,000 – Boys	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Asian	51.7	41.7	32.0	28.9	23.1	22.5	17.0
Black	184.2	155.7	111.3	94.0	83.2	85.7	76.4
Chinese/other	43.6	39.0	31.9	27.8	22.9	21.1	22.9
Mixed	101.5	96.3	71.7	61.9	56.0	54.7	41.3
White	75.4	62.9	50.2	46.1	42.0	40.1	31.0

C4

Multiples of White Arrest Rate – Boys	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Asian	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5
Black	2.4	2.5	2.2	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.5
Chinese/other	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.7
Mixed	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.3
White	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0

C5

Reason for Arrest – Boys 2016/17	Asian	Black	Chinese /other	Mixed	Not stated	White
Criminal damage and arson	74	242	22	91	25	411
Drug offences	344	1065	105	285	34	949
Fraud offences	15	46	5	6	2	44
Misc crimes against society	109	363	42	109	14	336
Possession of weapons	94	657	32	131	15	273
Public order offences	54	276	18	73	18	249
Robbery	123	925	43	200	26	368
Sexual offences	48	219	20	39	8	173
Theft offences	272	1142	133	386	67	1656
Violence against the person	307	1065	90	299	67	1052
Total	1440	6000	510	1619	276	5511

Appendix D: Tables – Girls aged 10-17

D1

Population Totals – Girls	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Asian	67072	67630	69117	71213	73363	75963	78137
Black	71486	70379	70150	70571	71945	73751	75452
Chinese/other	17590	18181	18830	19542	20100	20826	21370
Mixed	32981	33073	33360	34066	34731	35718	37135
White	169340	168084	167539	167895	167947	169015	170387
Total	358469	357347	358996	363287	368086	375273	382481

D2

Arrest Totals – Girls	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Asian	361	296	213	187	185	164	132
Black	1932	1376	1020	998	921	794	838
Chinese/other	163	163	101	86	93	70	85
Mixed	794	612	465	416	420	377	383
White	3375	2625	1816	1817	1580	1604	1201
Not stated	125	105	93	80	64	95	73
Total	6750	5177	3708	3584	3263	3104	2712

D3

Arrest rate per 1,000 – Girls	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Asian	5.4	4.4	3.1	2.6	2.5	2.2	1.7
Black	27.0	19.6	14.5	14.1	12.8	10.8	11.1
Chinese/other	9.3	9.0	5.4	4.4	4.6	3.4	4.0
Mixed	24.1	18.5	13.9	12.2	12.1	10.6	10.3
White	19.9	15.6	10.8	10.8	9.4	9.5	7.0

D4

Multiples of White Arrest Rate – Girls	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Asian	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2
Black	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.1	1.6
Chinese/other	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.6
Mixed	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.5
White	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0

D5

Reason for Arrest – Girls 2016/17	Asian	Black	Chinese/ other	Mixed	Not stat- ed	White
Criminal damage and arson	11	70	6	56	8	111
Drug offences	14	7	9	29	4	102
Fraud offences	3	9	3	4	1	14
Misc crimes against society	10	50	1	31	5	67
Possession of weapons	4	20	2	9	0	23
Public order offences	10	67	8	23	6	54
Robbery	1	42	1	10	2	35
Sexual offences	1	4	3	0	0	3
Theft offences	33	209	27	60	14	350
Violence against the person	45	320	25	161	33	442
Total	132	838	85	383	73	1201

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