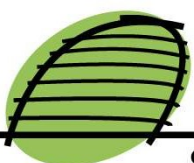


ZERO MURDERS: A VISION TO END HOMICIDE IN LONDON



A report by **Caroline Russell AM**
Green Party Member of the London Assembly
October 2021



INTRODUCTION

Murders often hit the headlines, they are violent, brutal losses that are presented as shocking, one-off events, but they leave lasting trauma in whole communities.

Between 2005 and 2020 a total of 2,140 lives were lost to homicide in London, according to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS).¹

That is 2,140 lives violently cut short, 2,140 families living without a loved one, and 2,140 more homicides than there should have been.

It should be neither inevitable nor acceptable that so many people are murdered in London.

I believe that each one of those deaths could have been prevented, and that London should be aiming for a target of zero homicides.

It is a target that we have for deaths on the road through Vision Zero, and there is no reason why we should limit our ambition to end preventable death to road deaths.²

Tackling crime and violence is important to Londoners, 43 per cent of us say crime is the city's most urgent problem.³

The data the MPS collects about homicide doesn't show how victims came to be murdered, and each death does not currently get a full review, so it is hard to learn lessons that could help prevent future deaths.

However other deaths do get reviewed. Local authorities conduct Safeguarding Adult Reviews when an adult dies as a result of abuse of neglect, Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews when a child dies or has been seriously harmed, and Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) in the case of domestic homicide.^{4,5,6}



This autumn the Mayor's Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) will participate in a Government pilot reviewing each homicide that involves an offensive weapon, (defined as anything that is 'made or adapted for use for causing injury to the person').^{7,8} These will be called Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews (OWHRs).

The OWHR pilot aims to review each homicide and learn lessons that can help to prevent the loss of another life. OWHRs will be conducted for homicides not covered by existing statutory reviews such as DHRs.

The Home Office has asked for London to be one of the pilot areas and the VRU say they will be working with partners across London, to help design and pilot OWHRs so the reviews work for London.

My report looks at homicide in London from 2005 to 2020. It shows who the victims of homicide are, and the work being done to understand these murders both London-wide, and at borough level.

Caroline Russell AM
October 2021

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS ABOUT HOMICIDE IN LONDON

Notes on the data

In English and Welsh law homicide consists of four separate offences: murder, manslaughter, infanticide, and corporate manslaughter. This report is using the data for homicide which encompasses all these offences.

In the period covered, 2005-20, there were 2,012 cases of murder, 114 of manslaughter, three of infanticide and 11 of corporate manslaughter.

It is important to note that this report uses data from the MPS, however parts of London fall under the jurisdiction of City of London Police and British Transport Police (BTP). For example some of the victims of the London terrorist attacks are included in this report, but victims of the three tube bombings were in the jurisdiction of BTP and so are not included.

The available data from the MPS homicide dashboard includes five factors, they are:

1. Age of victim
2. Borough where homicide occurred
3. Ethnicity of victim
4. Method used
5. Sex of victim

Comparing London to the rest of the UK

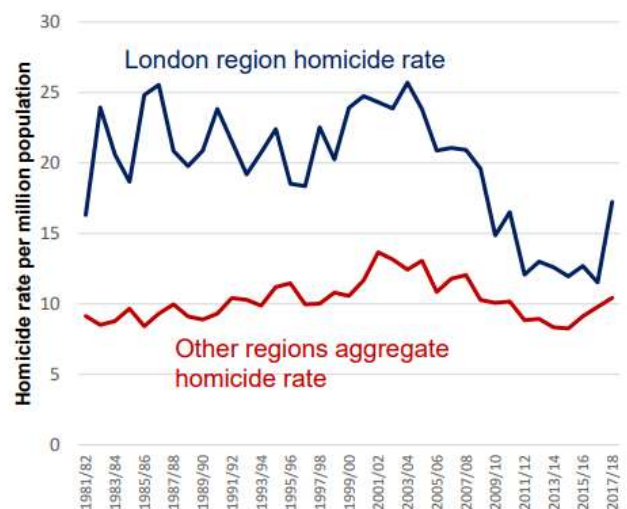
From data available from the Home Office, produced in March 2020 and going back to

1981, we see that **London’s homicide rate has been consistently, and significantly, higher than in other regions.**

London’s homicide rate had been steadily coming down from a peak in 2003-04 but in 2017-18 there was a sharp rise with 18.4 homicides per million people that year, as can be seen in the graph.⁹

Since then data from the Home Office shows that this fell to 14.1 homicides per million in 2018-19 before rising again to 16.5 homicides per million in 2019-20.¹⁰

Figure 9: Homicide rates in England & Wales, by region



Source: Home Office HI, ONS mid-year population estimates by region

Age of victim

The number of homicides of people aged 13-24 and 25-34 is consistently greater than any other age group and homicides of people in just these two age groups represent more than half of all homicides.

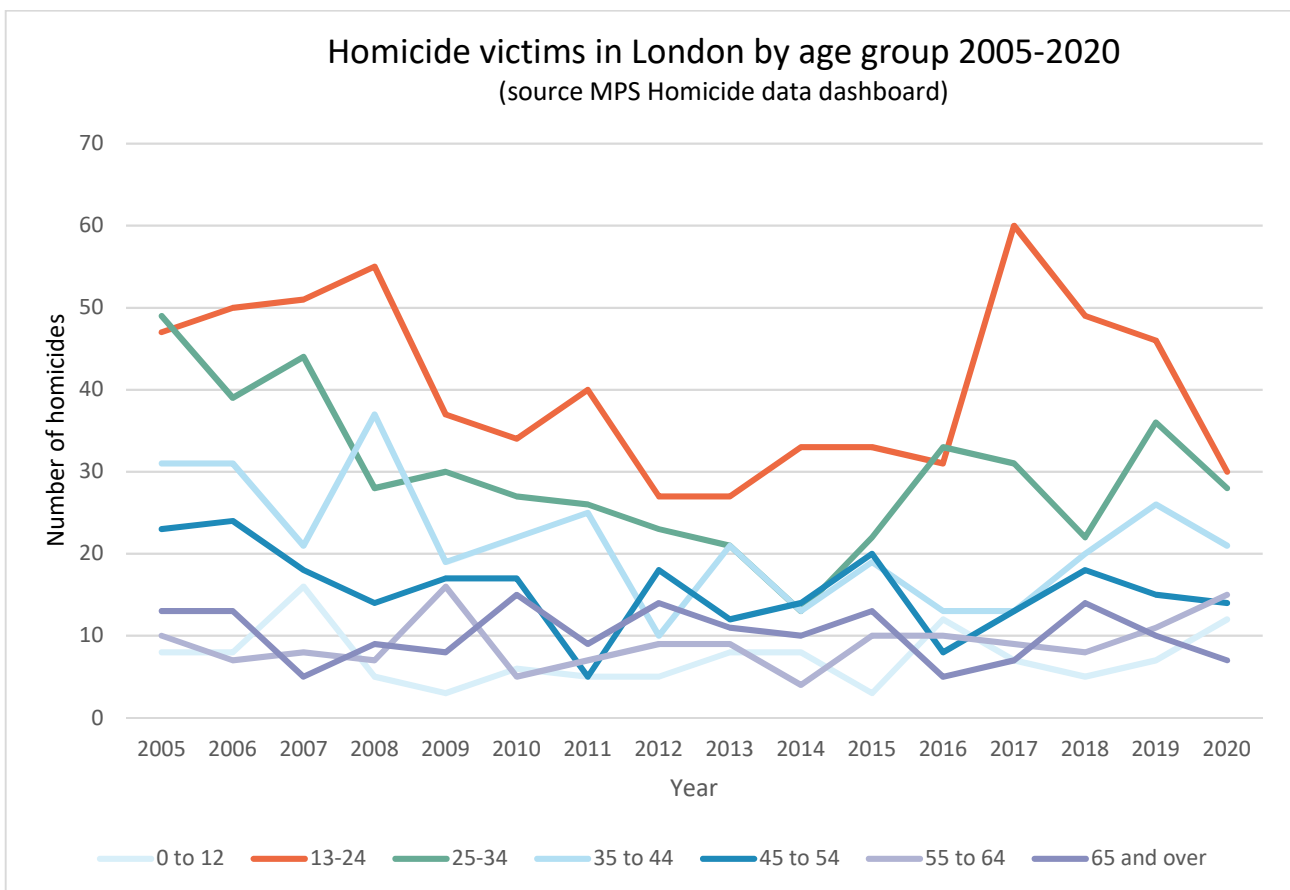
In 2017 there were 60 homicides of people aged 13-24, this is nearly double the number for the next largest age group.

There are only two years when 13-24 was not the age group with the most homicides, in 2005 and 2016, when the slightly older age groups 25-34 had the highest number of victims.

Young people under 25 are most at risk of being murdered in our city.

Any life lost to homicide is a tragedy, and these young people especially deserve to be safe in our city, to be able to thrive, not just survive.

Finding ways to reduce the violence suffered by these age groups will be critical to reducing overall homicides in London.



Boroughs

The map below shows the number of homicides per 100,000 residents in each borough between 2005-2020.

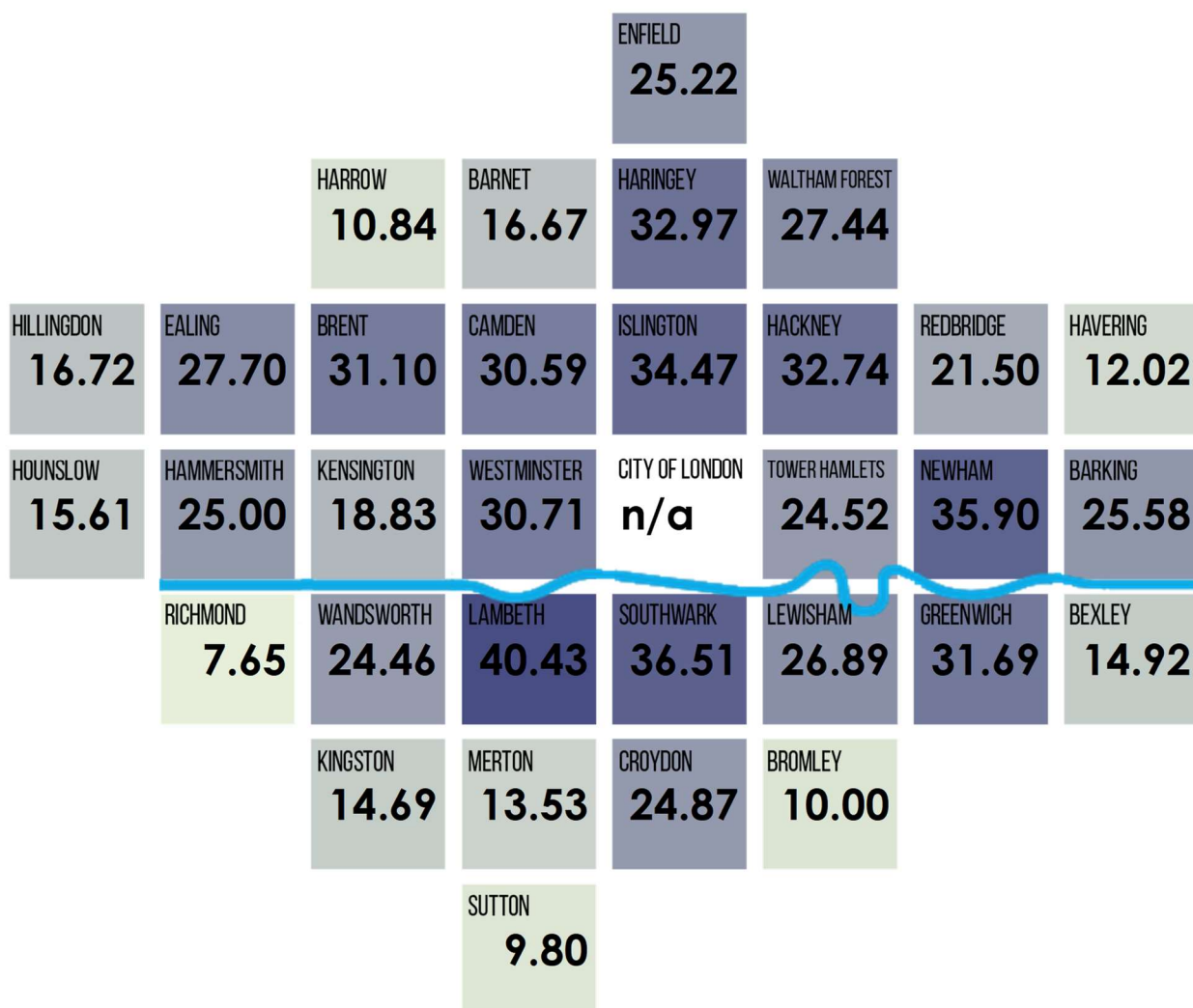
Boroughs with lower average ages tend to have a larger number of homicides, while boroughs with older populations tend to have fewer.¹¹ This reflects the overall trend discussed in the age of victim section, young people are more at risk of being homicide victims, and where there

are higher populations of young people, the risk is therefore higher.

It also appears that **inner London boroughs have higher homicide rates than outer London boroughs.**

I have used population data from Ethnic Groups by Borough from the London Datastore to create the homicide rates per 100,000 in order to maintain the consistency of source data throughout this report.¹²

Borough homicide rates per 100,000 2005-2020



Ethnicity of victims

Looking at ‘Homicides in London by ethnicity of victim 2005-2020’ until 2016, there were overall more homicides of white people each year than any other group.

Since 2016 there have been more homicides of Black people than white people. This is particularly worrying considering that Black people make up around just 11 per cent of London’s population while white people make up 59 per cent.

The shocking disproportionality can be seen very clearly when looking at the homicide rate by ethnicity of victim per 100,000 residents. When looking at the rate by ethnicity as well as by age, this disproportionality is even more stark.

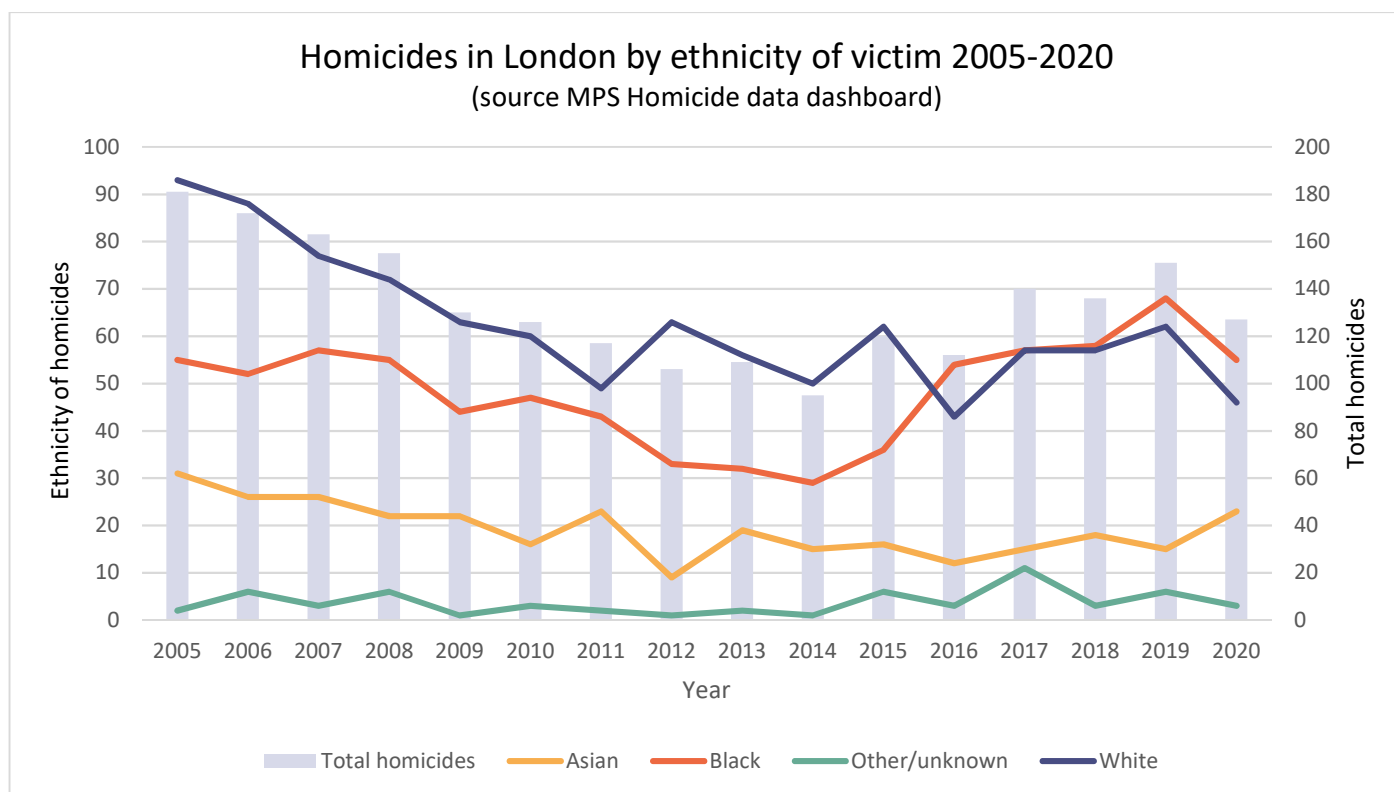
Worryingly, Black people of any age are far more likely to be victims of homicide than any

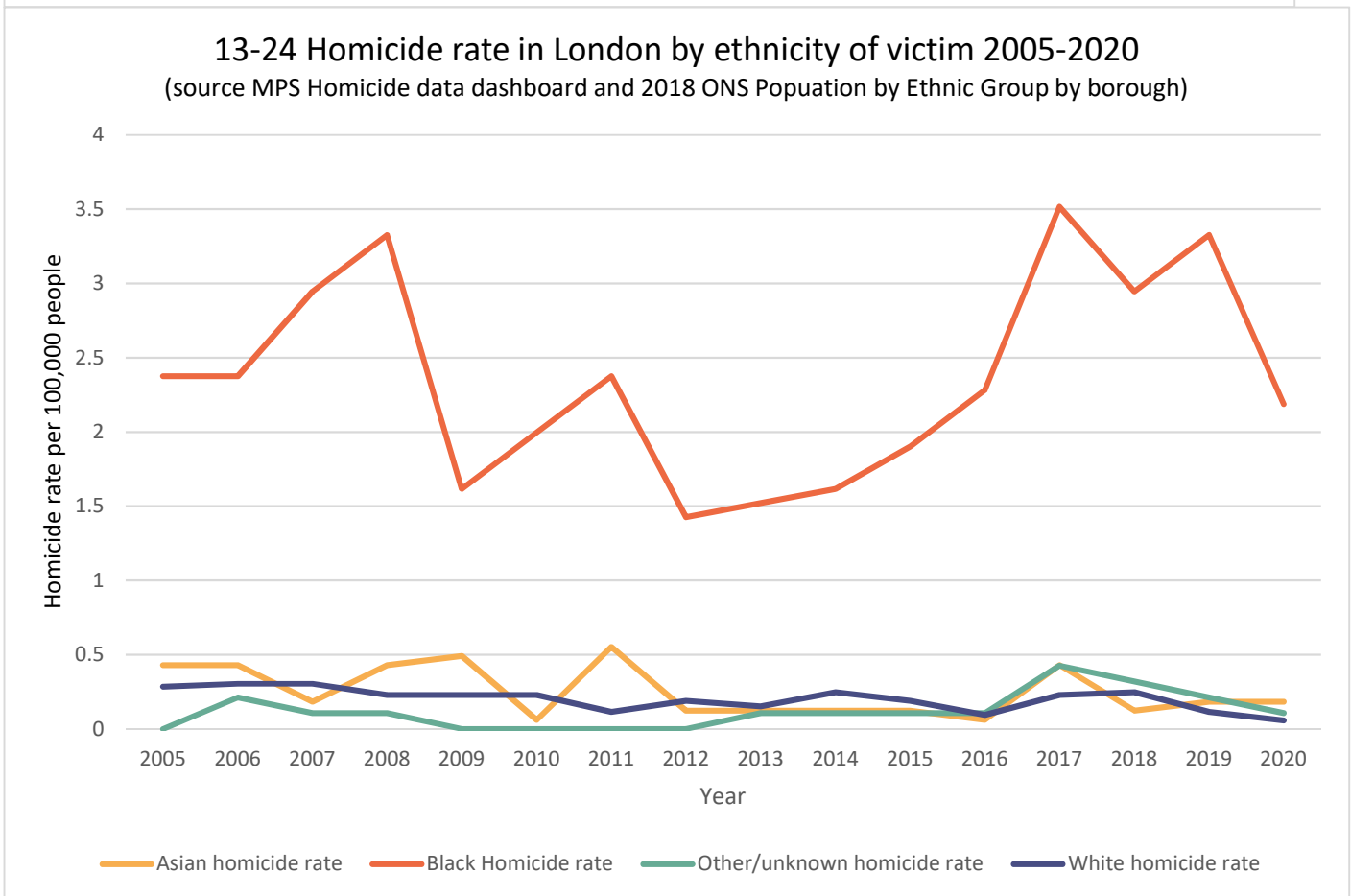
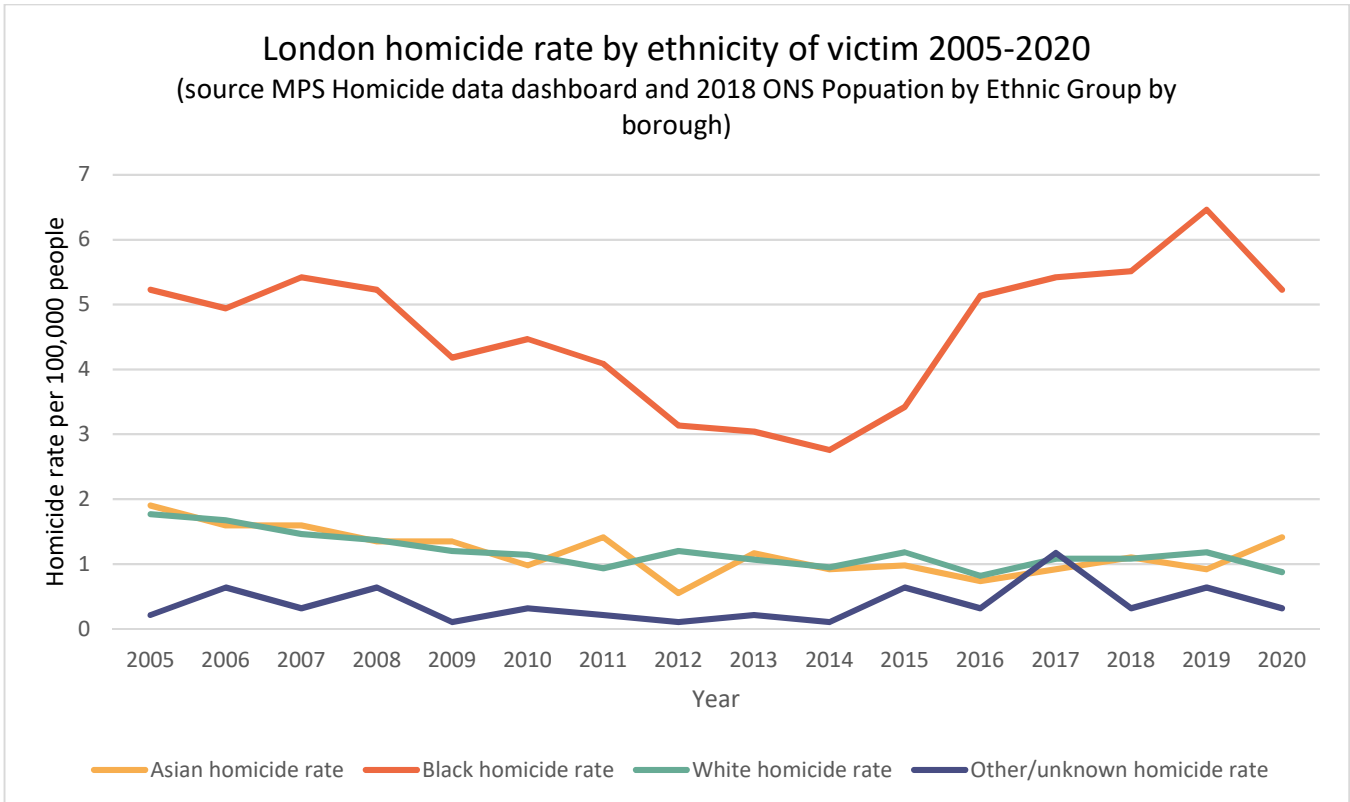
other ethnic group, on average nearly four times as likely.

And this disparity is worse when looking at the homicide rate amongst 13-24-year olds which shows that **young Black people aged 13-24 are far more likely to be victims of homicide than any other age or ethnic group.**

These graphs use data from the London Datastore’s Ethnic Groups by Borough data set for consistency.¹³ The data provides population estimates at a London-wide and borough level by ethnicity. The latest data available is from 2018 and so this has been used to create the homicide rate per 100,000 residents.

A limitation of the data from the MPS homicide dashboard is that the victims’ recorded ethnicity is based on the perception of the officer attending the scene. It is possible that these victims of murder might have self-identified their ethnicity differently.



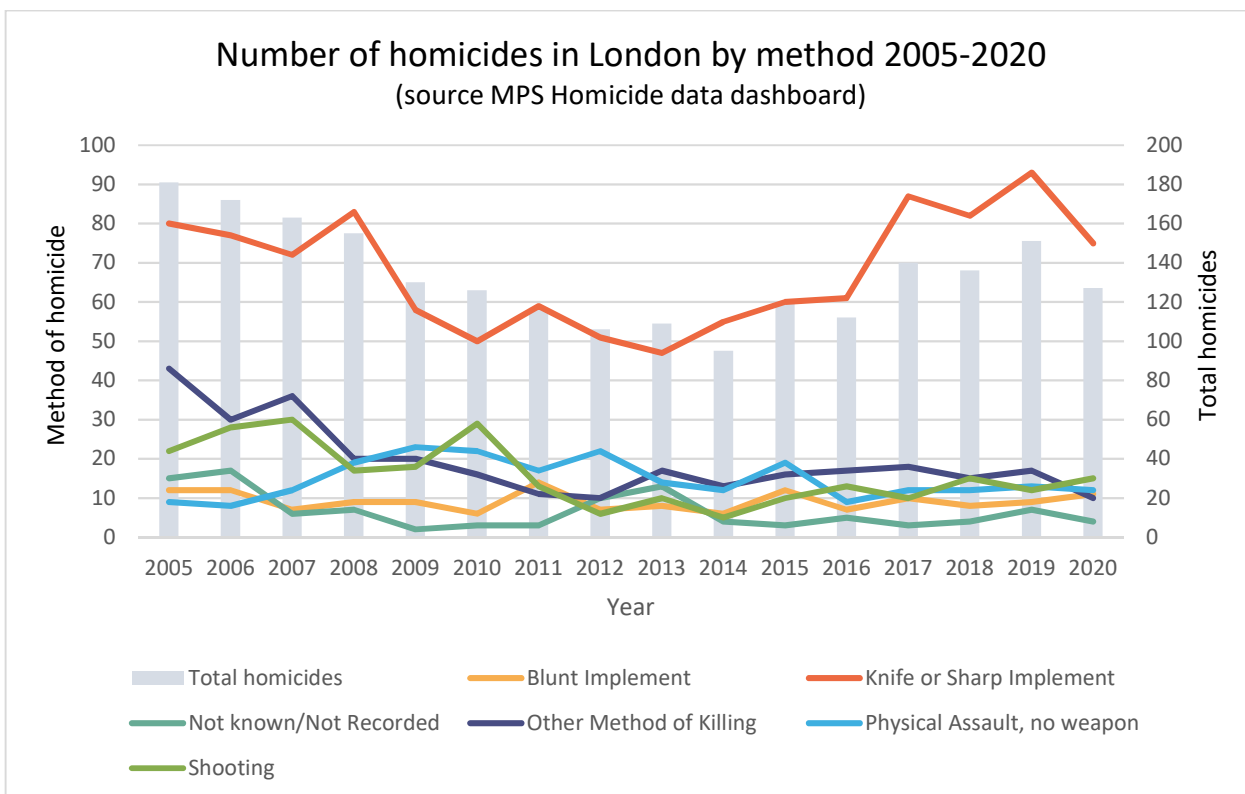


Method of homicide

While homicides fell consistently from 2005 to 2012, and were at their lowest point in 2014, sadly since then they have been increasing, with a peak of 151 homicides in 2019.

Deaths from most methods of homicide other than knives have been decreasing or remained stable since 2005.

Worryingly, sharp implements are disproportionately represented in the data as the method of homicide, and since 2014 homicides committed using a knife or sharp implement have been steadily increasing in London.



Gender of victims

In the following section it is important to note that the data comes from the Metropolitan Police Homicide dashboard, so is bound by the categories of data in the dashboard.

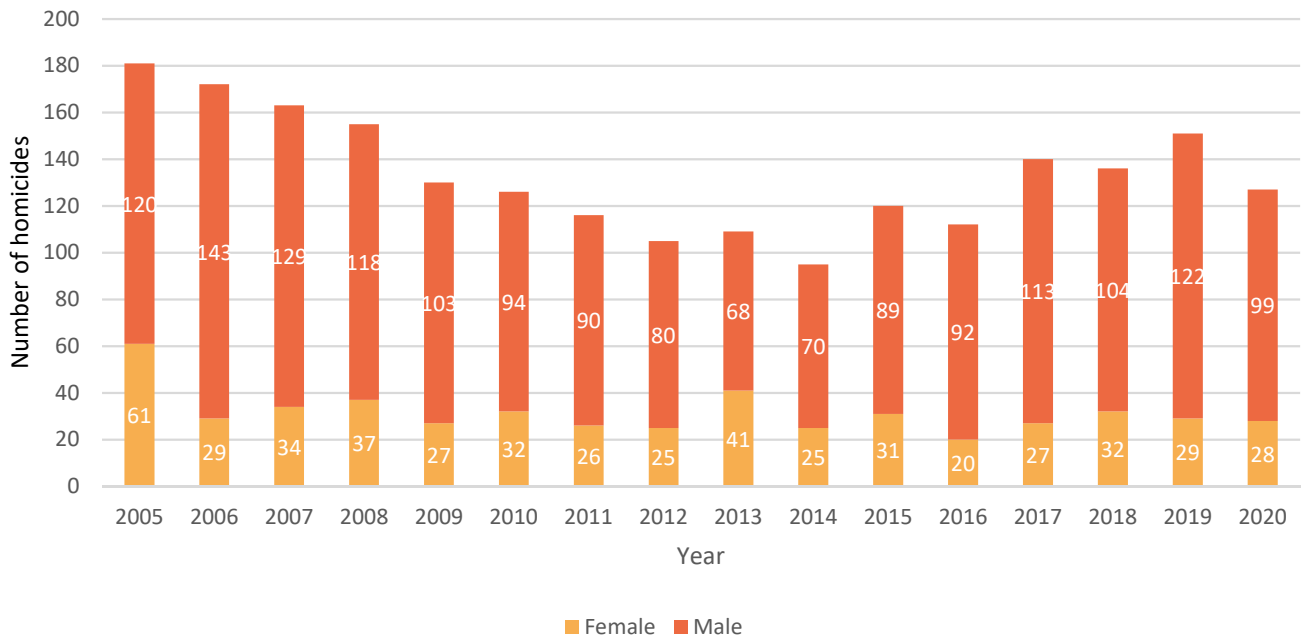
Data for gender is recorded as sex in a binary way, and there is currently no data recorded in the dashboard on non-binary, trans, or gender diverse people. The Met dashboard does not appear to record this information, which is a limitation of the data.

In London homicide victims are overwhelmingly (76 per cent) men. This combined with ethnicity and age represents a worrying picture of disproportionality affecting young Black men.

Domestic abuse homicides from 2005 to 2020 represent 16.8 per cent (361 out of 2,140) of the overall homicide deaths in London. However, **the victims of domestic abuse homicides are overwhelmingly (74 per cent) women and mainly aged between 25-44.** These domestic abuse homicides are disproportionately gendered.

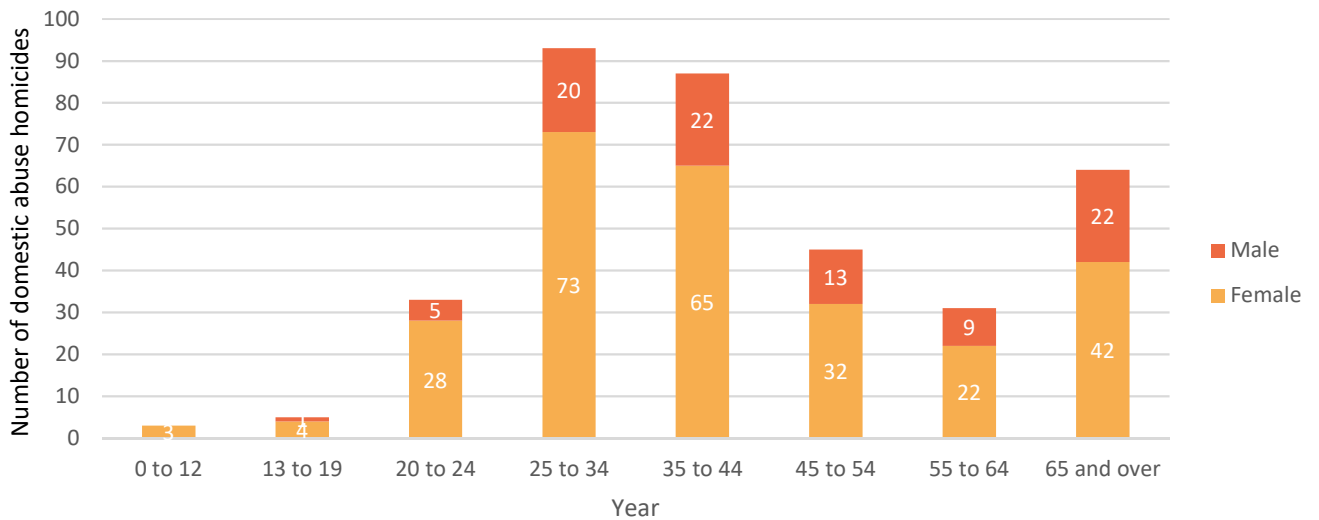
Number of homicides in London by sex 2005-2020

(source MPS Homicide data dashboard)



Number of London domestic abuse homicides by sex and age group 2005-2020

(source MPS Homicide data dashboard)



Domestic abuse homicide

Domestic abuse homicides have fallen since 2005, although worryingly, they have been steadily increasing since 2014.

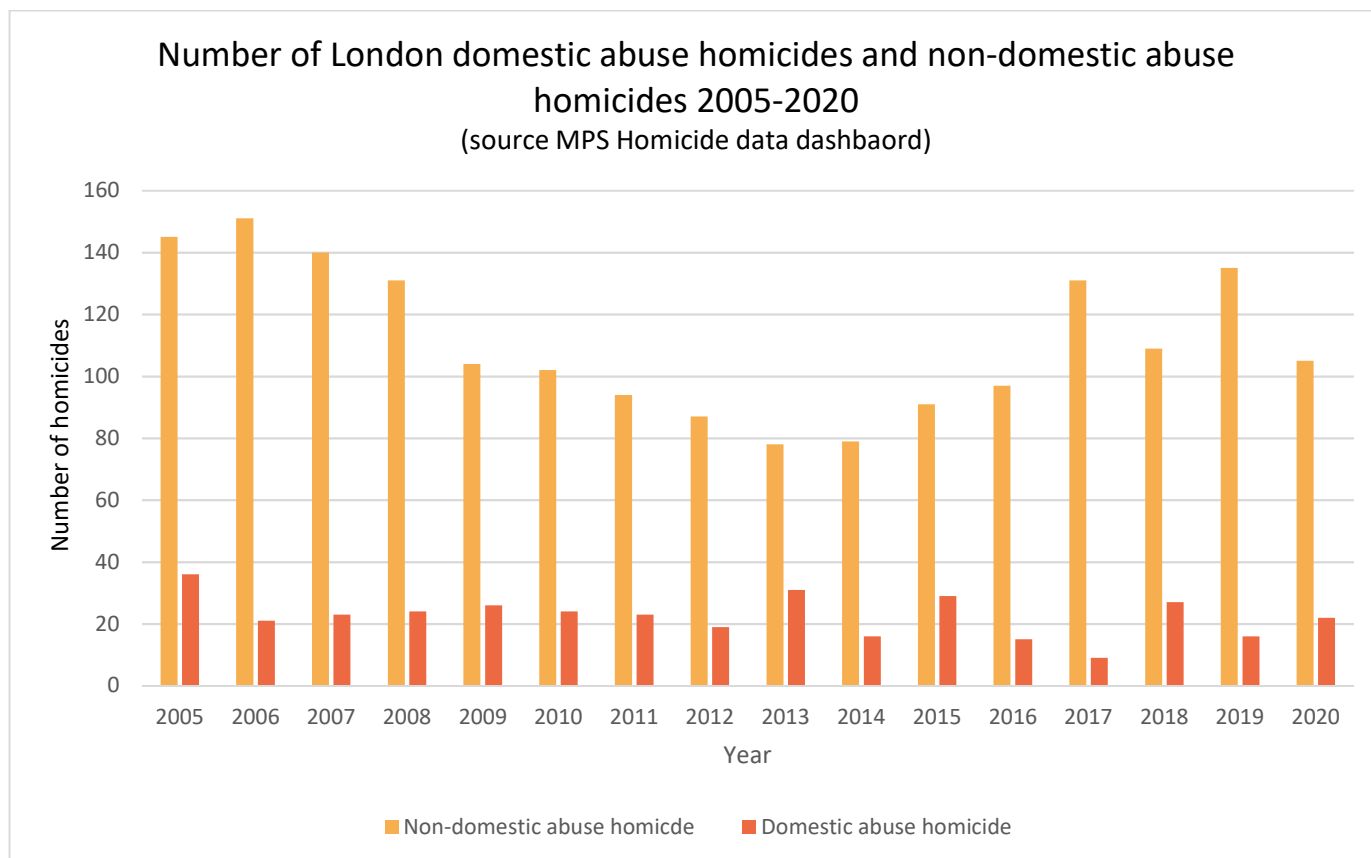
As the number of domestic abuse homicides is a smaller percentage of overall homicides, it can be harder to identify broad trends and make conclusions for effective interventions.

Intimate partner killings and domestic abuse homicides are often escalations of patterns of domestic abuse and violence, which academics

say could be tracked by police and other agencies.¹⁴

While domestic abuse is often a hidden and complex crime, a first step to identifying causes that lead to homicide is to understand as much as possible about the circumstances leading up to each death.¹⁵

This is why Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) are carried out in the case of every domestic homicide, to learn any lessons to help prevent future deaths.



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEWS?

What is a domestic homicide review?

A Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) is a multi-agency review of the circumstances in which the death of a person aged 16 or over has, or appears to have, resulted from violence, abuse or neglect

- by a person to whom they were related
- or with whom they were, or had been, in an intimate personal relationship,
- or a member of the same household as themselves.

Since 13 April 2011 there has been a statutory requirement for local areas to conduct a DHR following a domestic homicide that meets the criteria.

DHRs examine how and why events occurred. They look at whether the homicide could have been prevented and if anyone other than the perpetrator was to blame.

Guidance from the Home Office specifies the purpose of these reviews:¹⁶

1. Establish what lessons can be learnt from the homicide about the way local organisations work together and separately to safeguard victims

2. Identify what those lessons are, how they will be acted on, and in what timescales, and what will change as a result
3. Prevent domestic abuse and homicide and improve responses for all victims by making sure domestic abuse is identified and responded to at the earliest opportunity
4. Contribute to a better understanding on the nature of domestic abuse
5. And highlight good practice

But it is important to note that DHRs are not inquiries into how the victim died or who is guilty, that is for coroners and criminal courts.

A DHR follows what happened from the victim's perspective, to help identify any barriers they faced in reporting abuse, and why interventions did not work for them.

It should also evaluate whether the policies and procedures in place were effective, and whether a change in policy might have resulted in a different outcome.



How does a DHR work?

When a domestic homicide occurs the police in that area should tell their Community Safety Partnership (CSP) in writing. CSPs are made up of representatives from the police, local authorities, and from local fire, probation, and health services. There is one for every London borough.

Reviews should take place as soon as possible, within one month of the homicide coming to the attention of the CSP and be completed within six months. The review panel must include representatives from the agencies listed above and may also include voluntary sector input where they may have helpful insight about the case.

Each agency involved in the review, looks at whether the homicide shows that they need to change the way they work or provide more support to their workers to improve standards, as well as offering an opportunity to highlight best practice.

A final Overview report is published on the local CSP website that brings together and draws overall conclusions from all the individual reviews and any other reports in an action plan to be taken forward by the CSP.

Challenges for DHRs

Independent Domestic Violence Advisor and DHR chair James Rowlands said in his recent

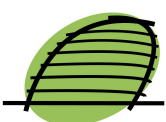
report on DHRs: “reviewing domestic homicides is a necessary if challenging endeavour” and that the reviews have the potential to do good.¹⁷

He describes reviews being carried out at borough level varying in their style and quality, and the six-month time frame to publication rarely being met. Despite this, he is keen to point out that just because the DHR system could be improved does not mean that we should stop reviewing each case.

Domestic Violence charity Standing Together are concerned that no single agency has a complete library of finished DHRs and say that boroughs want the Home Office to keep a complete library of them. They also highlight a lack of information sharing between agencies as well as other factors such as lack of diversity on panels.¹⁸

They also report that 99 per cent of boroughs struggle to fund the domestic homicide reviews with the majority being funded through the Community Safety budget, and some using the dedicated Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) budget.

In addition, several boroughs found it difficult to retrieve all DHRs conducted since 2011, which raises the question of how much learning can be done if even the boroughs producing the reviews have difficulty accessing them.



CONCLUSION

It is important that the new Offensive Weapon Homicide Reviews learn from the challenges Domestic Homicide Reviews have faced. They need to be adequately funded, have panels that reflect the diversity of people living and working in areas they cover, and ensure that lessons can be learnt by sharing information between agencies and having a central library of completed reviews.

The Mayor should make every effort to learn from each homicide, aiming to reveal patterns of behaviour and circumstances which might help to develop schemes to reduce violence.

So I welcome the trials of Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews as a way of trying to reduce the number of people murdered with knives and sharp implements.

The shocking scale of London's loss of life to violence is reason enough to bring in reviews for all homicides. But beyond the tragic loss of lives, a recent report also shows that violent crime in London cost the capital £3 billion in 2019.¹⁹ The Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick has acknowledged that you can't arrest your way out of a crime problem saying we need prevention too.²⁰ Understanding the causes of homicide is an important first step.

London's Violence Reduction Unit was set up in March 2019 and aims to take a public health approach to tackling violence in our city.

The Offensive Weapons Homicide Review pilot programme that London is taking part in is a constructive step, applying the same scrutiny with a view to learning lessons from deaths from offensive weapons as is applied to domestic violence deaths.

I hope that we see this scheme continue and become part of the way that London treats homicides. These reviews should look back at the way people interacted with public services as well as the police. But we also need to look further back too.

We need to look at what life chances were there for both the perpetrator and the victim, and what early interventions could have been made to help them. On top of this societal factors like deprivation also need to be examined.

Without looking at this wider picture, we will struggle to tackle the causes of violent behaviour or be able to identify the factors that need addressing before violence occurs.

The outcomes of this pilot must feed into the Mayor's new Police and Crime Plan and be put at the heart of London's policing.

But in order for any recommendations and action plans that come out of these reviews to be put in to place, there needs to be adequate funding.

The Mayor should ensure that the VRU has the resources to conduct these reviews. In addition, he should work with the various agencies to ensure that they have the capacity to implement the recommendations so agencies can work together to reduce the number of homicides. I also believe he should set a target of zero murders in London within ten years, so he has a target to aim for.

We owe it to all current Londoners, as well as all future Londoners to make this city as safe as it can be for everyone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After looking at the data and looking at how other kinds of homicide reviews are conducted, I believe that the following recommendations, if enacted effectively, could play a part in a vision to end homicide in London.

Recommendation 1

The Mayor should set a goal of zero murders in London within 10 years in order to have a strategic goal, focused on prevention, to measure progress against

Recommendation 2

The Mayor should ensure that London's Violence Reduction Unit has the resources to conduct Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews effectively

Recommendation 3

The outcomes of the Offensive Weapons Homicide Review pilot should feed into the Mayor's new Police and Crime Plan and be put at the heart of London's policing

Recommendation 4

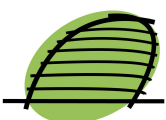
Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews should look holistically at a person's life and their interaction with public services and charities to learn lessons and correct processes to reduce the likelihood of another murder occurring

Recommendation 5

The Mayor should be ensuring that all recommendations produced by Domestic Homicide Reviews are assessed annually to monitor progress

Recommendation 6

The Mayor should commit to reviewing every murder that happens in London



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I would like to hear more from Londoners about their views on the potential of Offensive Weapons Homicide Reviews, reducing violence in London, and what the Mayor and Government can do to help.

Please get in touch with me if you have any comments or suggestions.

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This report sets out my views as an individual Assembly Member and not the agreed view of the entire Assembly.

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