

Improving crime statistics for England and Wales – progress update July 2020

Latest update on the progress being made to improve crime statistics for England and Wales.

Contact:
Nick Stripe
crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk
+44 (0)20 7592 8695

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1 . Introduction

The type and nature of crime is constantly evolving. One of our challenges is making sure we keep up to date with latest trends and provide the best overview of crime from all available sources. In the past we have implemented both user feedback and Office for National Statistics (ONS)-led improvements including:

- improving the crime survey to include fraud and computer misuse
- adding survey questions on abuse experienced as a child
- extending the age range for the self-completion part of the survey
- implementing an improved methodology for repeat victimisation

In the last year we have:

- designed and set up a telephone survey to collect data on crime in England and Wales while face-to-face interviewing has been paused as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic
- introduced a new shorter-style quarterly crime bulletin developed based on user feedback
- compiled a range of indicators from different data sources for the first time in our [child abuse compendium](#) to enable better understanding of the extent and circumstances of child abuse
- redeveloped the [domestic abuse release](#) to better meet user needs
- published an article and new tables on the [nature of fraud and computer misuse](#)
- published an article bringing together data sources on [modern slavery](#) to help understand the nature of this crime and the potential demand on support services
- collected and compiled data for presentation at various taskforce meetings to inform policymakers of trends in burglary and vehicle theft offences

Over the coming year, we are facing increased uncertainty as a result of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on our ability to collect the data we would usually through our face-to-face crime survey. Over this period, we will continue to engage with stakeholders to make the best use of available sources to understand trends in the extent and nature of crime.

This update outlines our current plans for improving crime statistics over the next 12 months, however these may be liable to change as we remain responsive to emerging priorities.

2 . Telephone crime survey

Purpose

Face-to-face interviews for the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) were suspended on 18 March 2020 as part of the efforts to minimise social contact and stop the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). As a consequence, we designed a new survey to be conducted via telephone to continue collecting vital information on victimisation and the perception and nature of crime during the coronavirus pandemic period while face-to-face interviews are not possible.

Design

The Telephone Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW) started data collection on 20 May 2020 and will be carried out on a continuous basis until at least January 2021. The TCSEW is based on re-contacting crime survey respondents interviewed in the previous two years on the CSEW who had agreed to be re-contacted for research purposes. As such, all respondents will be aged 18 years and over rather than aged 16 years and over.

As the number of respondents agreeing to be re-contacted is limited, the sample size on which quarterly estimates will be produced will be reduced from 35,000 cases to around 9,000 cases. This will limit the level of detail we are able to publish and will widen confidence intervals around the estimates. At present, the exact details of what we will be able to publish is unknown as this is dependent on both the response rate and prevalence of crime at this time, neither of which can be determined until the data have been collected and analysed. However, we expect it will be possible to publish victimisation rates and a limited offence type breakdown.

The telephone survey operation closely replicates that of the preceding face-to-face survey, although the scope and content of the survey was reduced for two reasons. Firstly, to reduce the overall length of a telephone-based survey to bring it down to an optimal time, the industry standard is 30 minutes. On average the face-to-face survey lasted around 45 minutes whereas most telephone surveys are less than 30 minutes in length.

Second, the content of the face-to-face survey included a series of questions on sensitive topics that respondents were asked to enter directly on to the laptop themselves (self-complete). Following ethics guidelines, these questions are deemed inappropriate for telephone interviewing and as such were not included in the TCSEW. As a result, estimates will not be available from the TCSEW in relation to sexual assault, partner abuse, abuse during childhood, and the preferred measure of domestic abuse and domestic violence.

While a large number of questions have been dropped from the survey, it was felt that a short COVID-19-related module of questions relating to crime and the criminal justice system should be included. These questions are likely to change and be adapted over the coming months as circumstances change. Currently the module includes questions relating to perceptions of crime, the police, and anti-social behaviour.

The TCSEW will not collect data from children aged 10 to 15 years old as the procedure for interviewing more than one member of the household via a telephone interview would be complex and add considerable time to the length of the household interview.

CSEW development

Until face-to-face interviewing resumes on the CSEW, future development plans for the survey are largely on hold. This includes:

- a wide-ranging user consultation on the future content and direction of the survey
- further research into moving the CSEW online
- the development of new survey questions on harassment
- a review of survey questions on domestic abuse
- a review of the 10- to 15-year-olds survey

3 . New analysis

Coronavirus and crime in England and Wales

Towards the end of August 2020, we plan to publish the first estimates from the Telephone Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCESW) on the perception and nature of crime during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It is our ambition to produce the first estimates of headline crime types from the TCESW. The publication will also contain analysis of monthly police recorded crime in the year prior to and over the coronavirus pandemic period including provisional data for May 2020.

Children's online behaviour

In 2019 we introduced [new questions](#) about online behaviour to the 10- to 15-year-olds children's Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). We will be publishing the first results from this module focusing on bullying later in 2020. This will be followed by a larger publication in early 2021 looking at results from the remainder of the module covering children's online safety more widely.

Inequalities in victimisation

It is our ambition to better address inequalities in victimisation and highlight those groups in society that are at most risk of experiencing crime. We plan to carry out further analysis, which will be released in a new publication on inequalities in 2021.

Lower geography estimates

We have investigated how we might be able to meet the need for lower geography estimates. As a test of feasibility, we are working on a separate publication on crime in Wales. This will include estimates based on the CSEW, combining three years of the survey together, as well as figures on crimes recorded by the police. It is our current plan to publish these estimates in 2020 or 2021.

Pathways to childhood vulnerability

We plan to use data from the CSEW to examine the extent and nature of "toxic trio" factors (substance abuse, domestic violence and mental ill-health) in households with children aged 10 to 15 years. The analysis will explore their usefulness as an indicator of children's vulnerability to negative behaviours and experiences such as victimisation, bullying and truancy. It is anticipated findings from this analysis will be published in 2020 or 2021.

4 . Changes to existing publications

Quarterly bulletin

Following the suspension of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), over the next year our quarterly crime bulletins will take a different format. They will still cover trends in the main crime types as measured by the Telephone Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW), however it will not be possible to make any comparisons between the telephone survey data and previous CSEW data. We will continue to publish police recorded crime data on a quarterly basis.

Domestic abuse

Alongside the annual domestic abuse publication, which will include data from the self-completion module of the CSEW for the year ending March 2020, we plan to publish an article focusing on domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This article will include data on domestic violence from the telephone survey.

Although the preferred measure of domestic violence has always been from the self-completion module of the CSEW, estimates from direct questioning of the respondent have also been produced for comparison. As the self-completion measure is not currently available, data collected from the telephone survey on domestic violence through direct questioning will be the only measure available. Further detail on the difference between the two estimates can be found in [Annex 1 of Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2019](#).

Nature of crime tables

In 2019 we decided to produce the nature of crime tables on three-year datasets in order to improve the reliability of estimates, as they would capture information from a greater number of crime incidents. Given current priorities, we will now produce estimates for the year ending March 2020 on single-year interviews. These are currently planned to be published on 3 September 2020. The move to using three-year datasets will be implemented after face-to-face CSEW interviews resume.

Sexual offences

We plan to publish the next sexual offences article in early 2021. This will provide analyses on sexual assaults from the year ending March 2020 CSEW and crimes recorded by the police. Because of other priorities at this time, we will not be including data from across the criminal justice system.

5 . Research and development work

Crime Severity Score

We will be seeking feedback on how the Crime Severity Score (CSS) is being used to decide if we should continue to include this in our quarterly crime statistics. If there is a demand for these data, we plan to update the weights used in deriving the CSS based on the latest sentencing data.

Feasibility study of a child abuse prevalence survey

It has been recommended that a national survey of child abuse should be commissioned. This would help inform the policy debate on this issue, with the goals of improving support given to victims and reducing the prevalence of this type of crime. We are carrying out research to decide if and how such a survey could work. By the end of 2020, we will publish findings from the first stage of feasibility research. This will include findings from desk research, stakeholder engagement and qualitative research, exploring some of the challenges of setting up such a survey. This research will inform the decision on whether the feasibility study should continue.