

Improving crime statistics for England and Wales – progress update October 2017

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1 . Introduction

This note provides an update on a comprehensive programme of work that aims to improve the design, coverage and presentation of crime statistics for England and Wales. The work has already expanded the coverage of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) to include crime types not previously incorporated including:

- new questions on fraud and cybercrime, which were introduced onto the CSEW in October 2015; [first estimates were released as Experimental Statistics](#) alongside the main statistical bulletin in July 2016
- the development of a module of questions on adult respondents' recollection of abuse experienced as a child; the main results of which were [published in August 2016](#), with further analysis looking at the impact of child abuse on later life [published in September 2017](#); we are currently refining the questions asked in this module, for inclusion in the CSEW in the survey year ending 2019

Ongoing work includes developments to the Crime Survey to further expand its coverage and improve its estimates, work to better meet user needs for statistics on domestic violence and abuse, the development of a crime severity measure based on police recorded crime, and further improvements to the crime statistics outputs we produce.

2 . Expanding the coverage of the CSEW

With fraud and computer misuse now covered by the adult Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) questionnaire, we now have a programme of work to include questions on elements of cybercrime into the child survey of 10- to 15-year-olds. This would include issues such as online bullying and meeting strangers online. We aim to introduce new questions into the CSEW child questionnaire from April 2018.

As well as improving the Crime Survey's coverage of crime types, we are also improving the population coverage. The self-completion modules on the adult survey have traditionally only been asked to respondents aged 16 to 59. From October 2016, the upper age limit on the self-completion modules was removed from a quarter of the survey sample and we assessed uptake from older participants alongside consideration of ease of use and other factors to determine whether the upper age limit could be removed. Testing showed that willingness to answer the self-completion declined as age increased, with the proportion of people completing the modules decreasing significantly for those aged 75 and over (58% compared with 85% for those aged 60 to 74). The age limit has therefore been increased from 59 to 74 from the start of the current survey year in April 2017.

3 . Improving the treatment of high-frequency repeat victimisation in CSEW estimates

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) was designed as a victimisation survey to measure the number of victims of crime in the population. It has also been used to measure the number of times a person is a victim of crime and hence the number of crimes experienced by adults living in households in England and Wales.

Producing such an estimate of incidents of crime is unproblematic for most crime types as the number of repeat victimisations suffered by an individual is usually small and easily recalled. For example, it is unlikely victims will not be able to remember the number of times their car was stolen or their house broken into in the previous 12 months. However, for certain crime types, such as violence in a domestic setting, the victim may suffer repeat victimisation with a frequency that is difficult to quantify over a 12-month period. High order repeat victimisation presents considerable challenges for the CSEW as only a relatively small number of victims yield a high number of victimisations.

Since one of the strengths of the CSEW has been its ability to provide trends for the crime types and population it covers, in cases of repeat victimisation the survey has always only included the first five incidents of a series in its estimate of the total number of incidents of crime in the population. If left unaddressed, survey estimates of incidents of crime would be subject to large sample variability from year to year (although estimates of the number of victims of crime are not affected). This would result in the publication of incident rates that would fluctuate widely between survey years, making it difficult to discern trends.

We ran a [consultation](#) on proposed recommendations for changing this methodology, following a review of the current and alternative methods. Based on the results of the consultation and advice from the National Statistician's Crime Statistics Advisory Committee in September 2016, it was agreed that:

- the 98th percentile of victim incident counts for each crime type (calculated over a number of years) will be used as the highest value on the number of repeat incidents for any one respondent that are included within estimates
- the time series will be revised back as far as possible
- uncapped data will be made available as part of our methodology information; however, as these estimates of total incidents will be subject to considerable volatility from year to year, strong caveats will be given around their use

Making these methodological changes and revising the back series is a complex and substantial piece of work. Since October 2016, we have been undertaking exploratory work to help us understand the impact that these changes will have upon CSEW estimates and time series for both adults aged 16 and over and children aged 10 to 15. Different approaches are being assessed to consider factors important to our users, such as the level of transparency, the level of volatility introduced into time series data and the sensitivity of different approaches to measuring changes in repeat victimisation over time.

In completing this work we have unearthed other issues that need detailed consideration, in particular the identification of large variability within design weights. We are in the process of assessing proposed refinements to our weighting methodology as a result. A methodological note: [Improving estimates of repeat victimisation derived from the Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) outlines in more detail the work we have undertaken to refine the methodology as well as a number of important decisions about how this methodology will be implemented.

Whilst it will be a substantial exercise, our initial work suggests that it is feasible to apply these methodological changes at least as far back as 2003 and potentially 1995 (a year often used for comparative purposes since many CSEW crime counts peaked in this year).

We have assessed that completing this work for our annual datasets will fulfil the majority of user requirements. However, should users have further requirements for the revision of quarterly datasets we will take this into consideration, albeit at lower priority than the revision of time series based on financial year data. We provisionally plan to publish the majority of our revised annual data as part of our year ending March 2018 release (which will be published in July 2018).

4 . Improving domestic abuse statistics

Following feedback received from users on the domestic abuse statistics we produced and published, a steering group was set up in November 2015 to review the current statistics and recommend changes to address identified issues that would result in a set of statistics that better meet user requirements. This group contains representatives from across government, academia and the voluntary sector. The work of the group identified that collecting good-quality information on the frequency of abuse and on coercive and controlling behaviour were the key priorities. New questions for the intimate violence self-completion module of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) have been developed and tested to collect this information, and these have been implemented into the survey from April 2017. The new coercive and controlling behaviour questions are very different to the previous questions on non-physical abuse. These questions are therefore being run on a split sample basis during the current survey year, to allow the impact on the long-standing time series for domestic abuse to be assessed. The new frequency of abuse question is being asked of the whole sample.

We have also been working with a range of other government departments and agencies on a new domestic abuse publication [Domestic abuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2016](#). This new release was developed in response to a recommendation made by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in their report [Increasingly everyone's business: A progress report on the police response to domestic abuse](#) regarding the availability of data to enable more thorough analysis of how domestic abuse is dealt with in local areas. The statistical bulletin and interactive data tool published in December 2016 was the first phase of this work and included data held by ONS, the Home Office and the Crown Prosecution Service. Feedback has been gathered from key stakeholders on the first phase and we plan to expand the scope of the second phase to include new sources of data such as Ministry of Justice, SafeLives and Women's Aid. It is currently planned that the second edition of the release will be published towards the end of November 2017.

5 . Developing a new “crime severity” measure based on police recorded crime

Official statistics on crime recorded by the police in England and Wales are presented as simple counts of the number of offences recorded or as a rate of offences recorded per head of population. On this basis each crime carries an identical weight regardless of seriousness. In collaboration with partners and with the support of the National Statistician's Crime Statistics Advisory Committee we have developed an additional measure, the Crime Severity Score (CSS), which weights different types of crime according to severity, with more serious crimes carrying a higher weight in order to better reflect the level of harm to society and demand of the police caused by crime.

[First research outputs](#) based upon the new CSS were published at the end of November 2016 and in February 2017 a successful workshop was held with analysts from police forces across England and Wales on how this new measure could help to inform decisions in front-line policing and the prioritisation of police resources. We have now reviewed the detailed feedback gathered from this workshop and the wider user community, and have implemented improvements to our methodology as a result. [Experimental Statistics](#) on the updated CSS have been released alongside the latest [Crime in England and Wales](#) statistical bulletin. We intend to issue an updated CSS dataset alongside each quarterly crime statistics bulletin.

6 . Reviewing and refreshing crime statistics outputs

As part of the programme of work to improve crime statistics for England and Wales we are reviewing our full range of statistical outputs. This will include an extensive review of the data tables published with each release, focusing on improving the accessibility of the data. As part of this review we will be seeking users' views on whether there is a continuing need for all of the data we publish and whether there are new needs for data we are not currently producing. We will also be looking at opportunities to exploit new data sources to meet user needs for more detailed information on the nature of crime.

This is ongoing work, and as a first step in response to feedback from users, we have reduced the length of our quarterly statistical bulletins on crime and changed the format in order to make the main messages more accessible. As a result of these changes, the bulletins will only include commentary on long-term trends or wider contextual information for those crime types where we have seen notable rises or reductions. Subject to feedback from users we intend to publish a series of articles, each focused upon a specific crime type, which will provide more detail than is routinely published in the quarterly bulletin. The first of these articles, giving an [overview of statistics on fraud](#), was published in July 2016 and four further articles were published in July 2017:

- [Overview of burglary and other household theft](#)
- [Overview robbery and theft from the person](#)
- [Overview of vehicle-related theft](#)
- [Overview of bicycle theft](#)

We welcome feedback on the new-format quarterly bulletin and on the new articles at crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk.