

Improving Crime Statistics for England and Wales – progress update July 2021

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

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1 . Overview

Measuring crime in the last year has been particularly challenging because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and government instructions to limit social contact. We have adapted both our data collection and the presentation of our statistics in response to the unfolding pandemic. In the last year we have:

- designed and set up the Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW) while face-to-face interviewing has been paused
- published a [report](#) on the comparability of TCSEW data with face-to-face Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) data
- set up a pilot study to explore the feasibility of using an address-based online survey for participant recruitment and online surveying

This work has allowed us to continue publishing our regular crime bulletins and to make improvements to our statistics as the type and nature of crime evolve. In the last year we have implemented both user feedback and Office for National Statistics (ONS)-led improvements including:

- reporting on the [impact of the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic on crime in England and Wales](#)
- integrating a range of monthly and quarterly data into our crime bulletins to better measure short-term changes in crime
- publishing articles on [childhood vulnerability to victimisation](#), [children's online behaviours](#) and [online bullying](#)
- compiling information on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on [domestic abuse](#) as part of our annual [domestic abuse compendium](#)
- publishing an article on [drug misuse](#) for the first time (previously published by the Home Office)
- integrating hospital data on admissions for injury with a knife or sharp object into our quarterly [crime bulletins](#)
- creating an experimental [database](#) bringing together all official statistics relating to knife or sharp instrument offences in England and Wales

Over the coming year we will continue to face uncertainty around our ability to collect the data we need to measure crime as the coronavirus pandemic continues to unfold. We are engaging with our survey contractor and other survey organisations to help inform our decision about when to return to face-to-face interviewing. While this is a priority in order to collect data on sensitive topics, such as domestic abuse, we recognise there is a balance with when the public would be willing to participate in such interviews. Over this period, we will also continue to engage with stakeholders on how to make the best use of available data 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 . Crime survey development

The Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW) has allowed us to continue measuring crime during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. However, we were not able to include sensitive topics, such as domestic abuse and sexual assault, on the TCSEW questionnaire because of concerns around confidentiality and respondent safeguarding. We recognise the importance of these data and work is currently being conducted on how we can further develop the crime survey for future use. This includes:

- evaluating the benefits and limitations of different survey modes (face-to-face, telephone, online) including the ability to include sensitive topics
- assessing the possibility of using mixed modes for data collection and its impact on statistical coherence and comparability
- exploring the practical challenges of returning to face-to-face interviewing in people's homes
- the age limit for the self-completion module on the face-to-face survey has been removed; a review of this change will take place on return to face-to-face interviewing

The crime survey for children aged 10 to 15 years was also paused in March 2020. The survey will continue to be paused while the adult crime survey is being developed.

3 . Changes to existing publications

Quarterly bulletin

Because of the suspension of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), over the next year our quarterly crime bulletins will continue to take a different format. They will still cover trends in the main crime types for adults aged 18 years and over as measured by the Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW). Comparisons over time will be made using newly created comparable TCSEW and CSEW datasets. These will be presented separately from the main CSEW data time series. As we are not currently collecting data from children aged 10 to 15 years, survey estimates for crimes against children will not be produced. We will continue to publish police recorded crime data on a quarterly basis.

Domestic abuse

This year's domestic abuse compendium will follow a similar format to previous years but will be shorter in length because of the unavailability of data from the CSEW for the year ending March 2021. The publication will contain police recorded crime data as well as information from across the criminal justice system and victim services.

Substance misuse

Because of changes in survey mode, TCSEW substance use estimates will not be comparable with CSEW estimates. Although we cannot publish our regular publication presenting prevalence rates, we plan to publish an article on victimisation, substance use and mental health to better understand the relationship between being a victim of crime and substance use and mental health.

Other regular publications

Some of our regular publications will be impacted by prioritising crime survey development and changes to questionnaire content because of constraints of conducting telephone interviews. These include:

- Nature of crime tables
- Property crime tables
- Nature of violent crime in England and Wales
- Sexual offences in England and Wales

Last year, we also outlined plans to better address inequalities in victimisation and investigate how we might be able to meet the needs for lower geography estimates. While this work continues, we have had to put publications related to these topics on hold to remain responsive to priorities as they emerged.

We will review our publication plans throughout the year based on availability of data and level of priority.

4 . Research and development work

Domestic abuse

To improve the collection of data on domestic abuse, a user engagement, research and testing programme to redevelop the domestic abuse questions within the self-completion section of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is under way.

Following a small-scale user survey in summer 2020, a research contract was awarded to a consortium led by the University of Bristol to:

- explore the issues with the current survey questions and data collected, alongside the user requirements
- investigate the use of alternative survey modes to ask respondents about their experiences of domestic abuse

This research is now complete and we are evaluating the findings and recommendations. We aim to publish a summary of the work and our future plans alongside the domestic abuse compendium publication later this year. We will continue to carry out further stakeholder engagement throughout the rest of the year.

Crimes against children

We are conducting a feasibility study to determine whether a national survey could provide an effective source of data on the current scale and nature of child abuse. [Findings from the first phase of research](#) to date were published in January 2021. We have not found evidence that a UK survey to measure child abuse would be infeasible. However, we have identified some important areas that would need further investigation before a conclusion can be made on whether a survey could be successful.

To inform our decision on the future of the feasibility study we held a [public consultation](#) between 21 January 2021 and 30 April 2021, which received 91 responses. Our response to the consultation will be published on 23 July 2021.

We will also carry out further research and stakeholder engagement over the remainder of this year. Providing this research is completed, we aim to publish a progress update this winter. This will summarise the findings from further work, our conclusion to phase one, and outline our next steps.

In the autumn we plan to hold a stakeholder engagement event to understand wider user requirements for data on crimes against children, and crime-related topics, to inform development of the 10- to 15-year-olds Crime Survey for England and Wales.

Crime harm

We received feedback on how the Crime Severity Score (CSS) is being used and agreed to continue to update this data tool on an annual basis. The data tool will be updated before the end of 2021. We also plan to do further work to explore how we can better measure crime harm using sources of data independent of police recorded crime.