

Chapter 2: Mobile Phone Theft

Coverage: **England and Wales**

Date: **09 May 2013**

Geographical Area: **Local Authority and County**

Theme: **Crime and Justice**

Summary – Mobile phone theft

- According to the 2011/12 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), around 2% of mobile phone owners experienced a phone theft in the previous 12 months. This proportion has been broadly consistent since 2005/06 (when the question was first introduced).
- Despite this, due to the increase in mobile phone ownership over this period, the number of victims of mobile phone theft has shown a small increase.
- Mobile phone theft victims were most likely to be children aged 14 to 17 or young adults aged 18 to 24 years with the victimisation rate of these groups being twice as high as the average (at around 4%). Specifically, women aged 18 to 24 were at highest risk of mobile phone theft victimisation with 1 in 20 experiencing a theft in the last year (2011/12 CSEW).
- Incidents of mobile phone theft increased to a peak in the 2003/04 survey along with increasing mobile phone ownership. Since 2003/04, the number of incidents involving a mobile phone theft has gradually fallen, reaching a low point in 2010/11 (despite a continuing increase in mobile phone ownership) but has subsequently risen in the 2011/12 CSEW.
- In 1993 the majority (73%) of mobile phone theft incidents were classified as **theft from a motor vehicle**. Comparatively, in 2011/12, the most common type of offence involving mobile phone theft was **other personal theft** where the phone was not in the owner's possession at the time it was stolen (39%). This is related to the change in the marketplace as car phones were soon replaced by handheld mobile phones.
- The increase in the volume of mobile phones stolen in incidents of personal theft is likely to reflect both their increased value and desirability to thieves and the fact that more people are carrying high-value phones on their person. Most recently, in 2011/12 the proportion of theft from the person and robbery incidents involving a mobile phone increased to 46% from 31% in 2010/11.

Mobile phone ownership

Since 2005/06 the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) has asked the survey respondent about every household member's ownership of mobile phones and their experience of mobile phone theft. It is not possible to differentiate 'smartphones¹' from 'mobile phones' on the survey as the question wording has remained constant on the CSEW². The subsequent analysis provides details

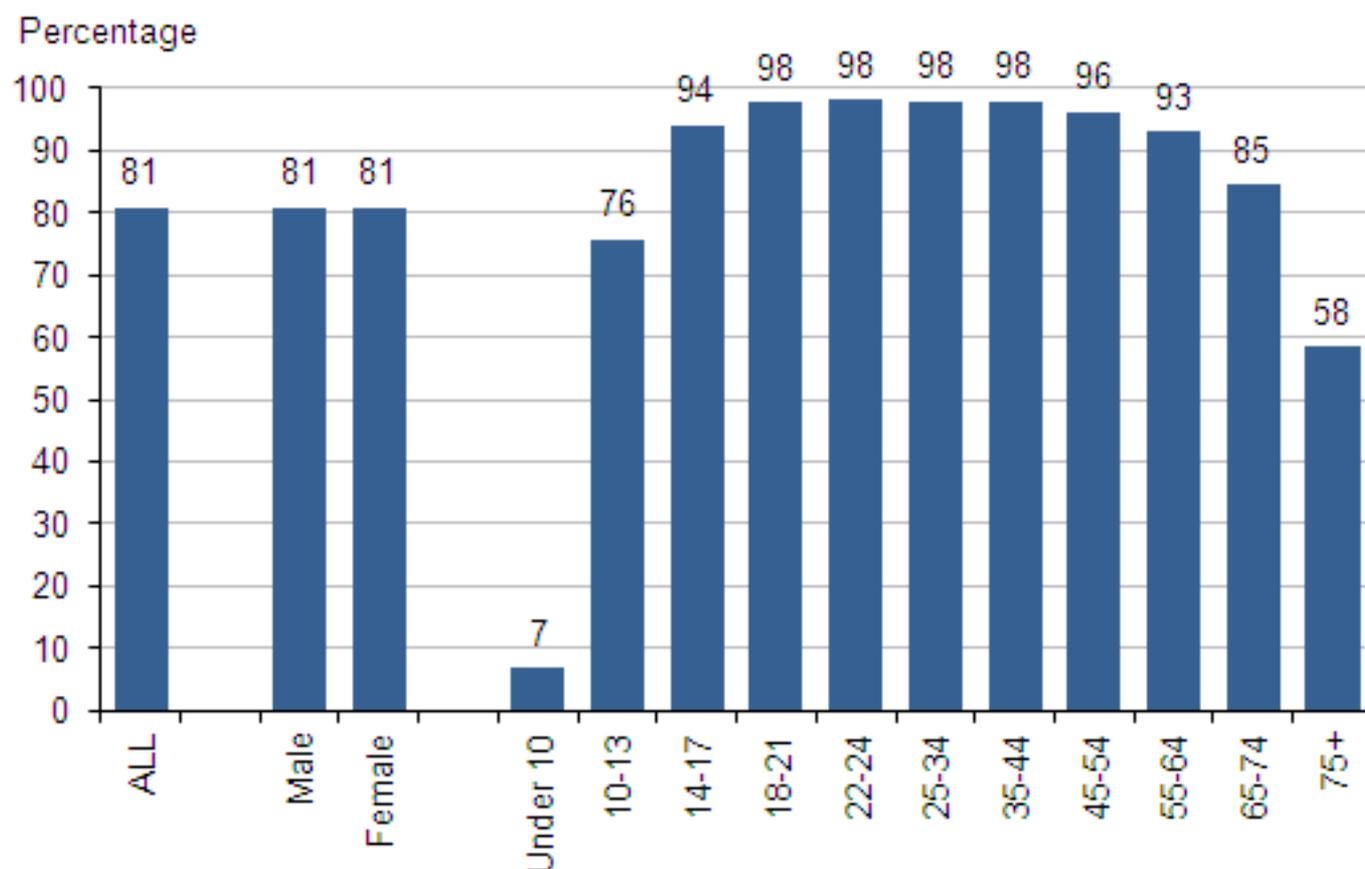
about individuals of all ages in surveyed households who own a mobile phone, including children under 16.

According to the 2011/12 CSEW, 81% of people resident in households in England and Wales owned a mobile phone. Mobile phone ownership has been increasing steadily over time ([Appendix table 2.01 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)) and the latest figures compare with 74% ownership in the 2005/06 survey. This is equivalent to 45.0 million individuals owning a mobile phone in 2011/12, compared with 39.3 million individuals in 2005/06 ([Appendix table 2.02 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)).

Mobile phone ownership among males and females has increased at a similar rate between the 2005/06 and 2011/12 surveys with the 2011/12 CSEW showing that similar proportions of males and females were mobile phone owners, equivalent to around 22.2 million males and 22.8 million females ([Appendix table 2.02 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)).

As shown in Figure 2.1 (and [Appendix table 2.01 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)), the highest levels of mobile phone ownership were among those aged 18 to 44 at 98%. Among children, ownership was lowest for those under 10 (7%) and among adults, those aged 75 or older were least likely to own a mobile phone (58%).

Figure 2.1: Proportion of individuals owning a mobile phone by gender and age, 2011/12



Notes:

1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.

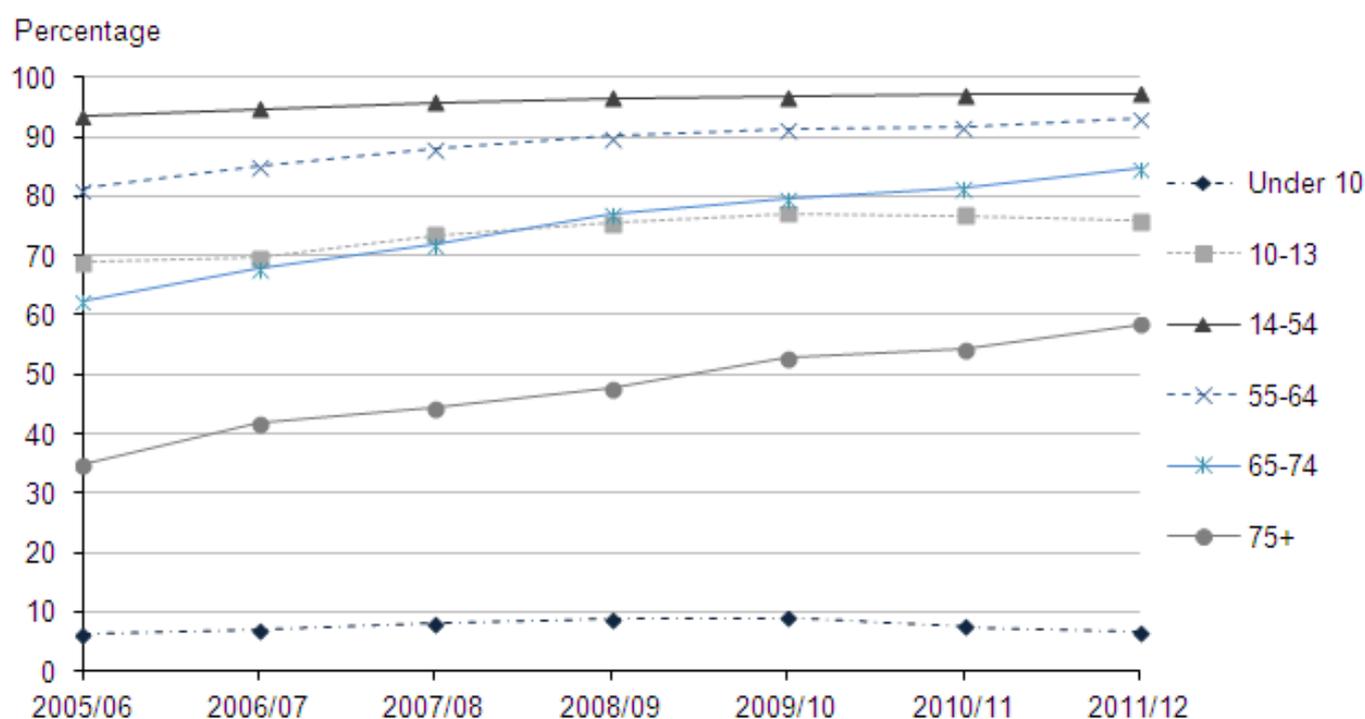
Download chart

[XLS](#) [XLS format](#)

(28 Kb)

Since 2005/06 there have been increases in mobile phone ownership across most age groups (see Figure 2.2). As might be expected the exception is ownership among those aged under 10 where the proportion has remained at around 7%. The greatest changes can be seen in the proportions of owners increasing within the older age groups: rising from 62% to 85% among 65 to 74 year olds and from 35% to 58% among those aged 75 or older. Fewer increases are apparent in the younger age groups, partly as ownership is nearer saturation (among 14 to 54 year olds at least 90% owned a mobile phone in 2005/06).

Figure 2.2: Proportion of individuals owning a mobile phone by age, 2005/06 to 2011/12



Notes:

1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.

Download chart

[XLS](#) [XLS format](#)

(28 Kb)

These figures align well with independent research from OfCom in 2012 which showed that mobile phone ownership among 16-44s in the UK is almost universal (98% among 16-24s and 97% among 25-44s), that ownership among 65-74s is 83% and those aged 75 or more are the least likely to use a mobile phone (59%). OfCom figures also showed that of those using a mobile phone in 2012,

45% had smartphones, an increase from 34% in 2011³. Elsewhere Ofcom reported that smartphone sales nearly doubled between Q1 2010 and Q1 2012, and by the first quarter of 2012, 64% of new handsets sold were smartphones⁴.

Notes

1. 'Smartphones' are a subset of mobile phones which have advanced computer capability, enabling functions such as cameras, GPS, touchscreens and web browsers.
2. "Have [you/you or anyone else now in your household] owned or had regular use of a mobile phone at any time [in the last year]?"
3. [OfCom: The Consumer Experience of 2012.](#)
4. [OfCom: Communications Market Report 2012.](#)

Prevalence of mobile phone theft

Since 2005/06 the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) has asked the survey respondent about every household member's ownership of mobile phones and experience of mobile phone theft. It is not possible to differentiate 'smartphones'¹ from 'mobile phones' on the survey as the question wording has remained constant on the CSEW². The following analysis provides details about individual owners of all ages, including children under 16, who have experienced theft of a mobile phone in the 12 months prior to interview.

According to the 2011/12 CSEW, around 2% of mobile phone owners experienced a phone theft in the last year. Between 2005/06 (when measurement began on the CSEW) and 2008/09, levels of mobile phone theft were similar but this was followed by a fall between 2008/09 and 2009/10 (from 2.1% to 1.7%). Since then levels have remained stable ([Appendix table 2.03 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)).

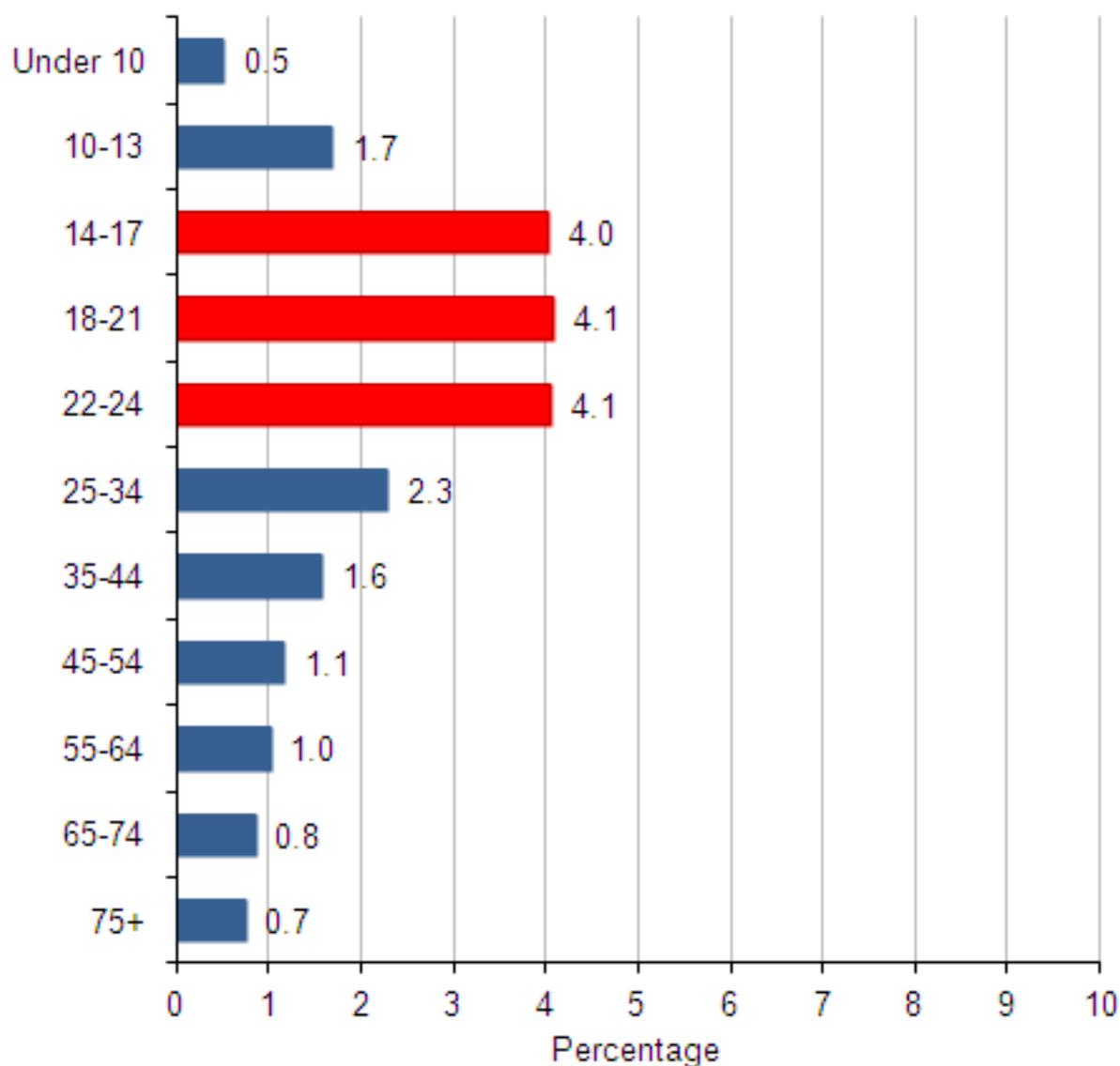
It is not clear what caused the fall in mobile phone theft prevalence between the 2008/09 and 2009/10 surveys, although they cover a period relatively soon after a charter was launched by the Mobile Industry Crime Action Forum (at the end of 2006) where the majority of mobile phones would be blocked (and hence unusable) within 48 hours of being reported stolen.

Prevalence of mobile phone theft by personal characteristics

According to the 2011/12 CSEW, teenagers and young adult mobile phone owners were more likely than other age groups to have had their mobile phone stolen in the 12 months prior to interview. This is consistent with previous analysis carried out on the 2007/08 CSEW³.

Figure 2.3 shows that 4 in 100 mobile phone owners aged 14 to 24 years had been a victim of mobile phone theft in the last year and were more likely to have experienced a theft than owners within any other age group.

Figure 2.3: Proportion of mobile phone owners who were victims of mobile phone theft in the last year by age, 2011/12



Notes:

1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.

Download chart

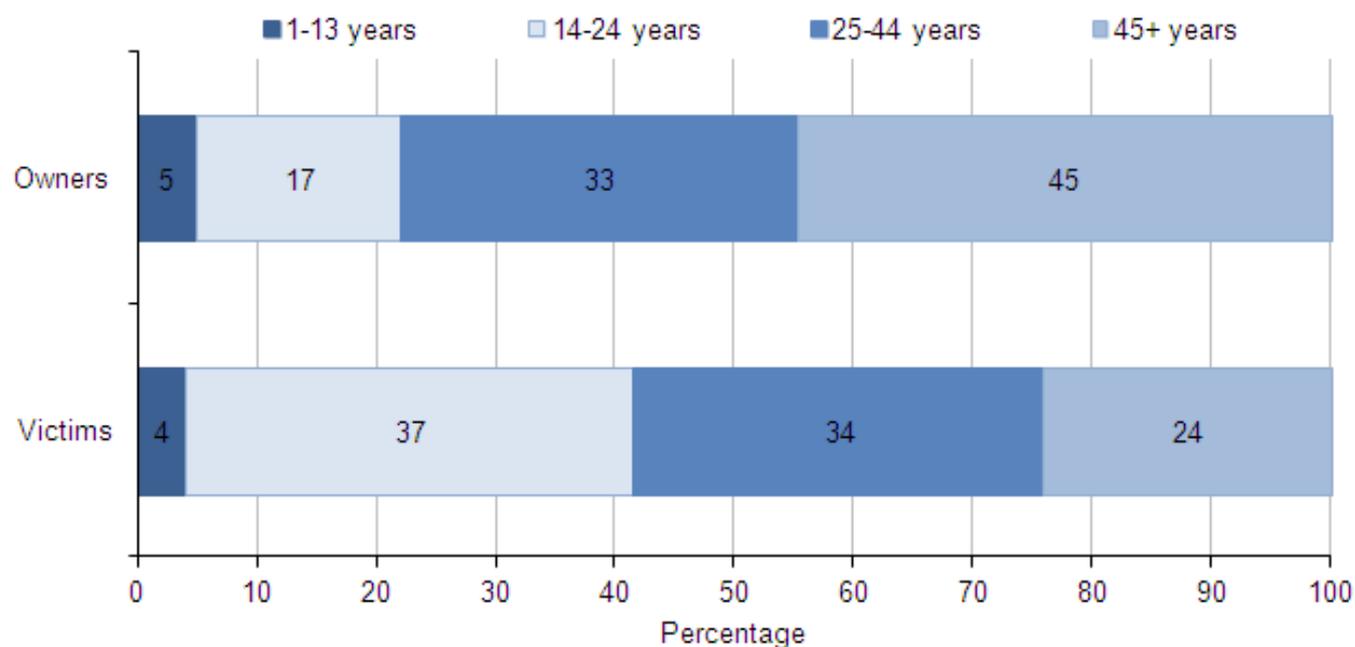
[XLS](#) [XLS format](#)

(27 Kb)

The combination of high rates of ownership and high rates of theft results in young people making up a disproportionate share of victims of mobile phone theft. As shown in Figure 2.4, although

just 17% of the mobile phone owning population is accounted for by 14 to 24 year olds, this group experienced 37% of mobile phone thefts (twice as many as one would expect if victimisation rates were evenly distributed). The converse was true in the older age groups: adults aged 45 or over comprised 45% of mobile phone owners but accounted for just 24% of thefts.

Figure 2.4: Proportion of mobile phone owners and proportion of mobile phone victims theft, by age, 2011/12



Notes:

1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.

Download chart

[XLS](#) [XLS format](#)
(27.5 Kb)

Latest figures show that the experience of mobile phone theft among male and female owners in the last year was similar at 1.8% and 1.9% respectively (2011/12 CSEW).

However, from the 2011/12 survey, likelihood of victimisation by both age and sex shows a slightly different pattern of risk between males and females (see Figure 2.5). Among younger age groups, boys were more at risk of mobile phone theft victimisation, notably:

- boys aged 10 to 13 were at higher risk (2.3%) than girls in the same age group (1.1%).

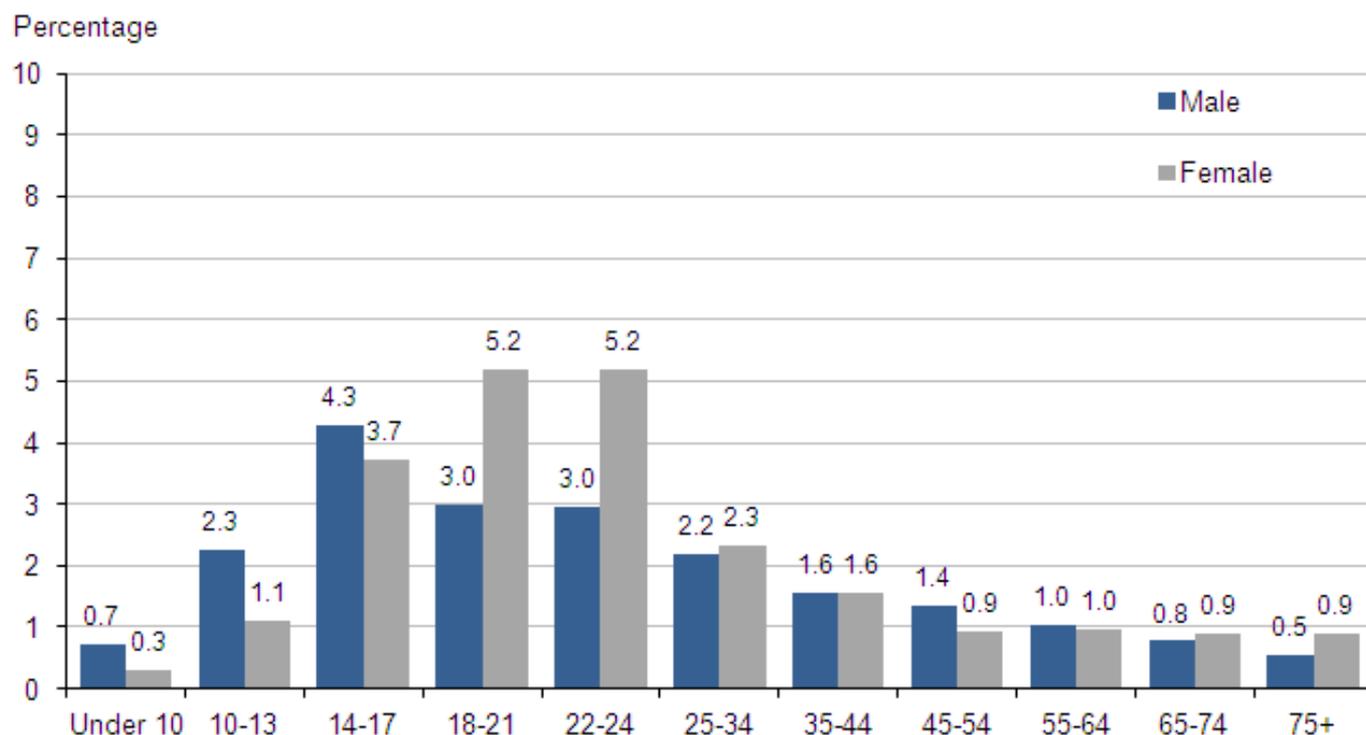
But among young adults aged 18 to 24 the pattern reversed, with young women being at higher risk than young men, specifically:

- 5.2% of women aged 18 to 21 and 22 to 24 had been victims of mobile phone theft in the last year compared with 3.0% of men in the same age groups.

This means that women aged 18 to 24 were at the highest risk of mobile phone theft victimisation, with 1 in 20 experiencing a theft in the last year (2011/12 CSEW).

Among adults aged 25 and older there was no statistically significant difference between men and women in risk of mobile phone theft victimisation.

Figure 2.5: Proportion of mobile phone owners who were victims of mobile phone theft in the last year by gender and age, 2011/12



Notes:

1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.

Download chart

[XLS](#) [XLS format](#)

(27.5 Kb)

According to the 2011/12 survey, owners aged 16 or over who were single were most likely to experience a mobile phone theft (3.1%) compared with all other types of marital status. Conversely, adult owners who were married were the least likely to experience theft of a mobile phone (0.8%, [Appendix table 2.03 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)). However, the different victimisation rates for single or married owners are likely to be related to the age profile of the groups (single adults would be more likely to have a younger age profile for example)⁴.

Trend in prevalence of mobile phone theft by personal characteristics

The trend in prevalence of mobile phone theft since CSEW measurement began in 2005/06 is similar for males and females. The statistically significant fall between 2008/09 and 2009/10 was

seen in prevalence rates for both males and females (males: from 2.2% to 1.7%; females: from 2.1% to 1.8%). Since then levels have remained stable for both males and females ([Appendix table 2.03 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)).

Compared with the 2005/06 CSEW, the 2011/12 survey showed little difference in the proportion of mobile phone owners experiencing theft for most age groups, but there were some statistically significant changes ([Appendix table 2.03 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)):

- A decrease in theft rates among mobile phone-owning children aged 10 to 13 (from 2.6% to 1.7%).
- A fall in the rate of mobile phone thefts among owners aged 14 to 17 (from 5.2% to 4.0%).
- An increase in the rate of mobile phone thefts among owners aged 75 or older (from 0.2% to 0.7%).

The age groups that showed a statistically significant decrease between the 2008/09 and 2009/10 surveys and thus contributed to the overall fall in prevalence of mobile phone theft at that time were ages 14 to 17, 25 to 34 and 55 to 64.

It is not clear what caused the fall in mobile phone theft prevalence between 2008/09 and 2009/10, although this was relatively soon after a charter was launched by the Mobile Industry Crime Action Forum (at the end of 2006) where the majority of mobile phones would be blocked (and hence unusable) within 48 hours of being reported stolen.

Trend in the number of victims of mobile phone theft

As the size of the population and levels of mobile phone ownership have increased between 2005/06 and 2011/12, it is important to look at the trend in numbers of victims experiencing a mobile phone theft as well as the prevalence rates.

An estimate of the number of victims of mobile phone theft can be calculated using mobile phone theft prevalence figures alongside the size of mobile phone-owning population in England and Wales.

An estimated 826,000 individuals were victims of mobile phone theft in the last year, according to the 2011/12 CSEW ([Appendix table 2.04 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)).

Around 815,000 individuals were victims of mobile phone theft according to the 2005/06 CSEW, increasing to an estimated 908,000 in 2008/09. The fall in prevalence of mobile phone theft in 2009/10 resulted in a lower number of victims (759,000) but numbers have been on the increase subsequently, to 826,000 in the 2011/12 CSEW ([Appendix table 2.04 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)).

Mobile phone **ownership** among males and females has increased at a similar rate between the 2005/06 and 2011/12 surveys, with the 2011/12 CSEW showing that similar proportions of males and females were mobile phone owners, equivalent to around 22.2 million males and 22.8 million females ([Appendix table 2.02 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)). Figure 2.6 describes the mobile phone theft trend for the number of male and female **victims**, which shows a similar pattern.

- There were around 426,000 male victims of mobile phone theft in 2005/06, slowly increasing (with increasing levels of mobile phone ownership) to 459,000 in 2008/09. A drop in prevalence in the 2009/10 CSEW suggested an estimated 368,000 males were victims of mobile phone theft. The number of male victims subsequently increased with ownership to the latest figures which show around 397,000 males were a victim of mobile phone theft in the 2011/12 CSEW.
- In the 2005/06 CSEW there were around 389,000 female victims of mobile phone theft, reaching 449,000 in 2008/09 alongside increases in mobile phone ownership. The fall in prevalence in 2009/10 returned the estimated number of female victims to that seen in 2005/06 (390,000). Subsequently the number of female victims of mobile phone theft is around 429,000, reflecting the increasing ownership figures.

Figure 2.6: Estimated number of victims of mobile phone theft by gender, 2005/06 to 2011/12 CSEW



Notes:

1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.
2. Source: England and Wales Population estimates, Office for National Statistics.

Download chart

[XLS](#) [XLS format](#)
(27 Kb)

Notes

1. 'Smartphones' are a subset of mobile phones which have advanced computer capability, enabling functions such as cameras, GPS, touchscreens and web browsers
2. "[In the last year] have [you/you or anyone else now in your household] had a mobile phone stolen?"
3. See Chapter 2 in [Home security, mobile phone theft and stolen goods: Supplementary Volume 3 to Crime in England and Wales 2007/08](#).

Incidents of mobile phone theft

Trend in incidents of mobile phone theft

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) asks questions of all adult respondents about any incidents of crime they (or someone in their household aged 16 or over) may have experienced in the last 12 months and what, if anything, has been stolen. As a result, the proportion of incidents that involved a mobile phone being stolen can be calculated.

Although the general trend from the CSEW shows acquisitive crime (that is, offences where items likely to be of value were acquired) peaking in the mid-1990s¹, the peak in incidents involving mobile phone thefts was much later since mobile phone ownership grew sharply from a low level in the early 1990s.

Figure 2.7 (and [Appendix table 2.05 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)) shows that the peak in the number of incidents involving a mobile phone theft occurred in the 2003/04 CSEW, at around 618,000 incidents and accounted for about 9% of acquisitive crimes (that is, theft from a motor vehicle, burglary with loss, other household theft, theft from the person, other personal theft, and robbery).

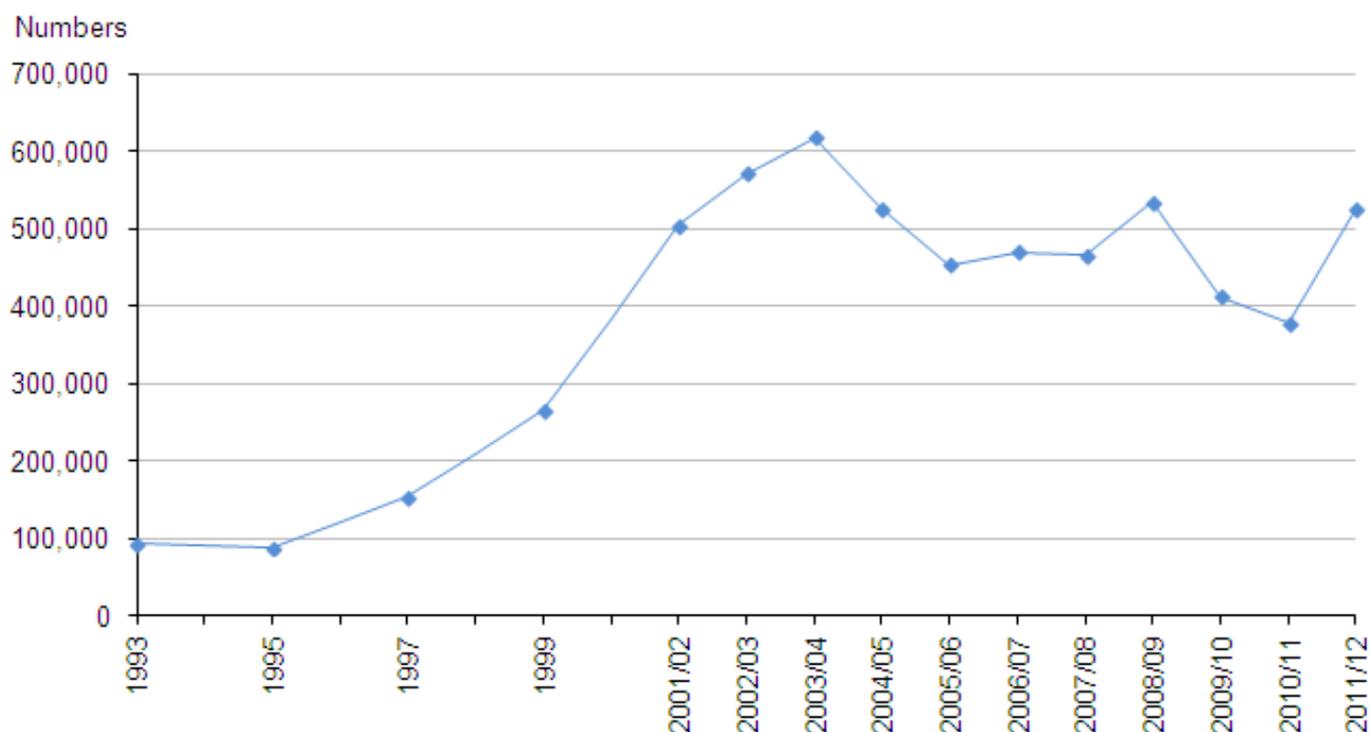
To reach the peak, the number of mobile phone theft incidents steadily increased from around 93,000 in 1993, which accounted for just 1% of acquisitive crimes in that year (see Figure 2.8). This is to be expected as levels of mobile phone ownership were considerably lower in 1993 than a decade later in 2003/04.

Since the peak in 2003/04, the number of incidents involving theft of a mobile phone has gradually fallen, reaching a low point in 2010/11 (around 378,000 incidents, despite a continuing increase in mobile phone ownership), but has subsequently risen to around 525,000 incidents in the 2011/12 CSEW.

OfCom figures from 2012 have shown an increase in both use of smartphones (45% of mobile phone owners had a smartphone in 2012 compared with 34% in 2011) and in smartphone sales (nearly doubling between Q1 2010 and Q1 2012)². Stolen smartphones not only have higher resale values than standard mobile phones but can also hold additional personal data (with

concerns around identity theft). Although it is not possible to tell from the CSEW data, it may be that smartphones are driving the latest increases seen in mobile phone theft incidents.

Figure 2.7: Trend in number of incidents involving mobile phones, 1993 to 2011/12



Notes:

1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.
2. Crimes included: theft from a motor vehicle, burglary with loss, other household theft, theft from the person, other personal theft, and robbery.
3. Data are not available for 1994, 1996, 1998 or 2000 as the survey was not run; a linear trend has been drawn between the data point before and after these years.

Download chart

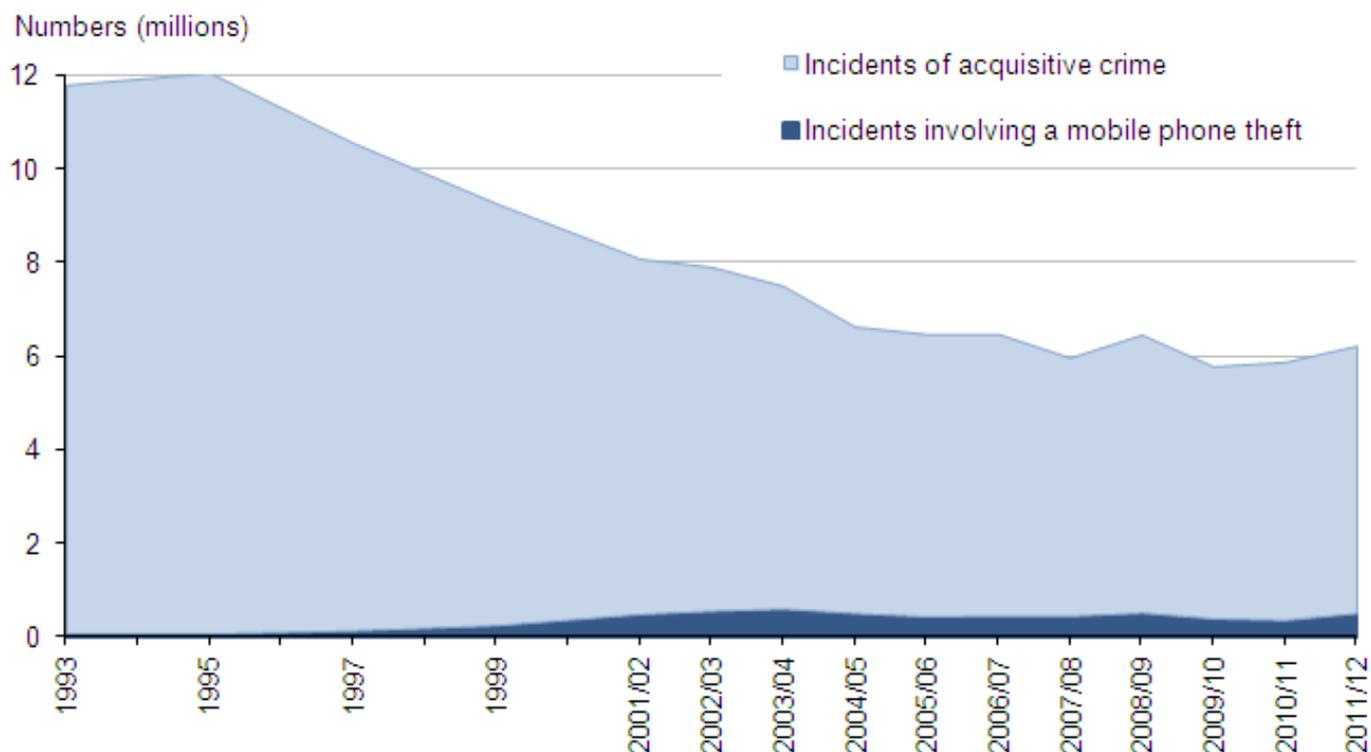
[XLS](#) [XLS format](#)

(28 Kb)

Figure 2.8 shows the proportion of incidents of mobile phone theft out of the overall number of incidents of acquisitive crime. This shows that acquisitive crime has fallen over the last 18 years while mobile phone theft has increased, with the number of mobile phone theft incidents peaking in 2003/04. However, it is clear that mobile phone theft incidents remain a small fraction of overall acquisitive crime ([Appendix table 2.05 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)):

- The 2011/12 CSEW shows that 9% of acquisitive crimes involved a mobile phone theft (this was around 1% in 1993 and has been around 7% to 9% since 2001/02).
- Looking at CSEW crime overall, 6% of total CSEW crime involved a mobile phone theft in 2011/12 (this was around 1% in 1993 and since 2001/02 has been around 4% or 5%).

Figure 2.8: Trend in number of acquisitive crime incidents and incidents involving mobile phone theft, 1993 to 2011/12



Notes:

1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.
2. Offences included in incidents of acquisitive crime: theft of and from a motor vehicle, burglary, bicycle theft, other household theft, theft from the person, other personal theft, robbery.
3. Offences included in incidents involving a mobile phone theft: theft from a motor vehicle, burglary with loss, other household theft, theft from the person, other personal theft, robbery.
4. Data are not available for 1994, 1996, 1998 or 2000 as the survey was not run; a linear trend has been calculated between the data point before and after these years.

Download chart

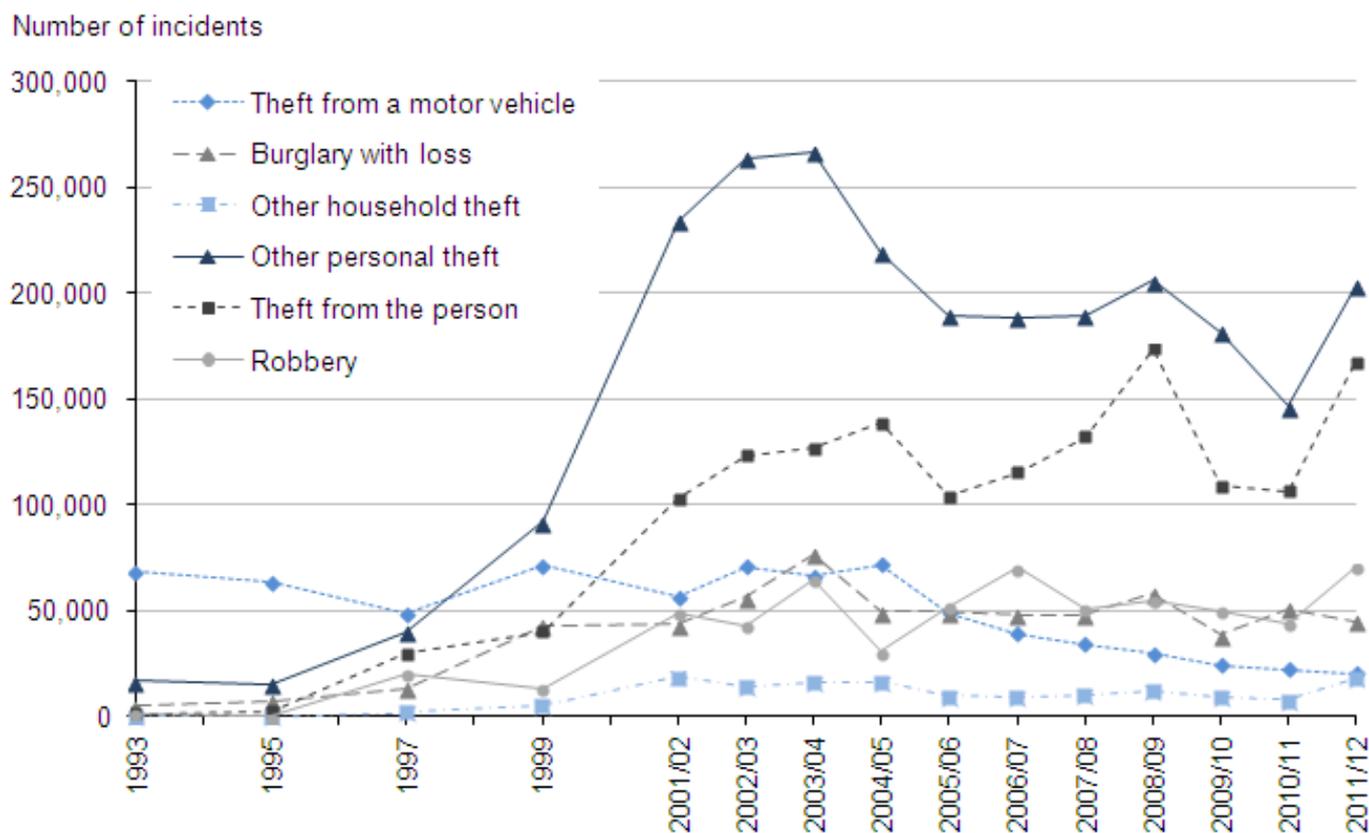
[XLS](#) [XLS format](#)

(28 Kb)

Trend in incidents of mobile phone theft by offence type

Figure 2.9 (and [Appendix table 2.05 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)) shows there are some notable variations in the number of incidents over time among the different offence types contributing to the overall number of mobile phone thefts (theft from a motor vehicle, burglary with loss, other household theft, theft from the person, other personal theft and robbery).

Figure 2.9: Trend in number of incidents involving mobile phone thefts by offence, 1993 to 2011/12



Notes:

1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.
2. See Chapter 5 of the User Guide for more information on crime types.
3. Data are not available for 1994, 1996, 1998 or 2000 as the survey was not run; a linear trend has been calculated between the data point before and after these years.

Download chart

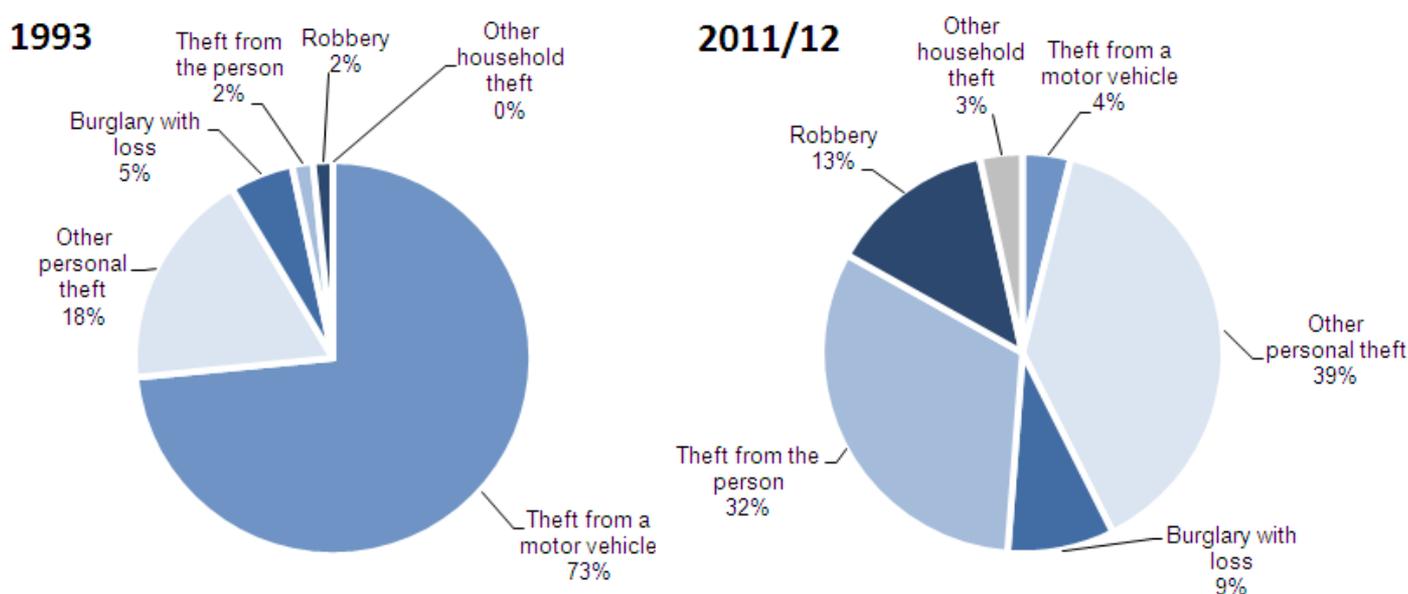
[XLS](#) [XLS format](#)
(32 Kb)

According to the 2011/12 CSEW, 7 in 10 incidents of mobile phone thefts were personal thefts, specifically theft from the person (for example, pick pocketing) or other thefts of personal property³. But the relative contribution of different crime types to mobile phone theft incidents has varied over time (see Figure 2.10 and [Appendix table 2.05 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)) reflecting the changing nature of the mobile phone market. Specifically:

- In 1993, the majority (73%) of mobile phone theft incidents were classified as **theft from a motor vehicle**. This proportion declined sharply in 1997 to 31% (as car phones were being replaced by handheld mobile phones in the marketplace) and again in 2001/02 to 11%. Currently mobile phone thefts from vehicles comprise just 4% of mobile phone theft incidents.

- Conversely only 2% of mobile phone incidents were **theft from the person** in 1993 but subsequently this increased to 20% in 1997 and most recently to around 32% of incidents (625,000 incidents, 2011/12 CSEW).
- In 1993 incidents of **other personal theft** were the second largest contributor to overall mobile phone theft, accounting for 18% of incidents. The number of incidents of other personal theft involving a mobile phone increased substantially from 1995 and since 2001/02 other personal theft has accounted for around 4 in 10 mobile phone theft incidents. In 2011/12 other personal theft was the largest contributor to mobile phone theft incidents.
- **Robbery** accounted for 2% of mobile phone theft incidents in 1993 and this proportion has steadily increased to account for around 10-15% of mobile phone theft incidents since 2001/02.

Figure 2.10: Relative contribution of acquisitive crime types to mobile phone theft incidents, 1993 and 2011/12



Notes:

1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.

Download chart

[XLS](#) [XLS format](#)

(28 Kb)

Notes

1. For example, see Table A1 in Appendix tables 2011-12 – [Crime in England and Wales, year ending March 2012](#).
2. See [OfCom: The Consumer Experience of 2012](#) and [OfCom: Communications Market Report 2012](#).
3. These are theft offences which involve items stolen from victims while away from the home but not being carried on the person (such as theft of unattended property in pubs, restaurants, entertainment venues, workplaces, etc.).
4. Analysis carried out on the 2007/08 CSEW showed similar results, see Chapter 2 in [Home security, mobile phone theft and stolen goods: Supplementary Volume 3 to Crime in England and Wales 2007/08](#).

Circumstances of mobile phone theft

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) covers incidents where adult survey respondents have indicated that they had either personally been a victim of mobile phone theft (for example, during a robbery) or that their household had been a victim (for example, a mobile phone stolen during a burglary). This analysis is based on data for adults aged 16 or over only.

Offence type

As shown previously (section on [Trend in incidents of mobile phone theft by offence type](#)), a number of different types of offence may involve the theft of a mobile phone.

According to the 2011/12 CSEW, the most common type of offence involving theft of a mobile phone was other personal theft where the phone was not in the owner's possession at the time it was stolen; around 4 in 10 incidents (39%) involving mobile phone theft were other personal thefts. The next most common offence was theft from the person (32%), where the phone was in the owner's possession when it was stolen but was taken without force ([Appendix table 2.05 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)).

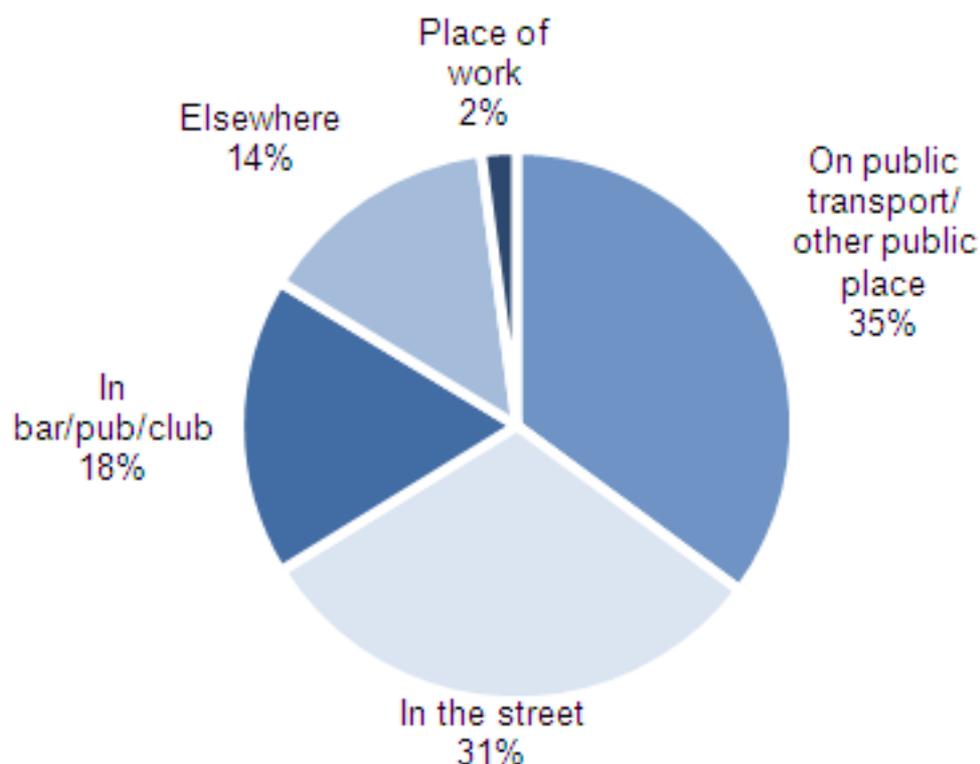
From the 2011/12 CSEW, in 85% of incidents where a mobile phone was stolen, the offences were crimes against the person, that is, theft from the person, robbery or other personal theft ([Appendix table 2.06 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)). The analysis that follows focuses on these crime types to explain more about the most common incidents. Theft from the person and robbery offences¹ (together accounting for 46% of mobile phone theft incidents) are analysed together as there are insufficient numbers of robbery cases to analyse these separately.

Location of theft by offence type

Figures 2.11 and 2.12 detail the location that mobile phone theft incidents took place (see also [Appendix table 2.07 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)).

- Around a third of incidents of theft from the person/robbery (35%) took place on public transport or in another public place (for example, an entertainment venue) but incidents were almost as likely to take place in the street (31%).
- Other personal theft offences involving mobile phones most commonly took place on public transport or in another public place (31%) or in a bar/pub/club (30%).

Figure 2.11: Proportion of theft from the person/robbery incidents involving mobile phone theft by location of incident, 2011/12



Notes:

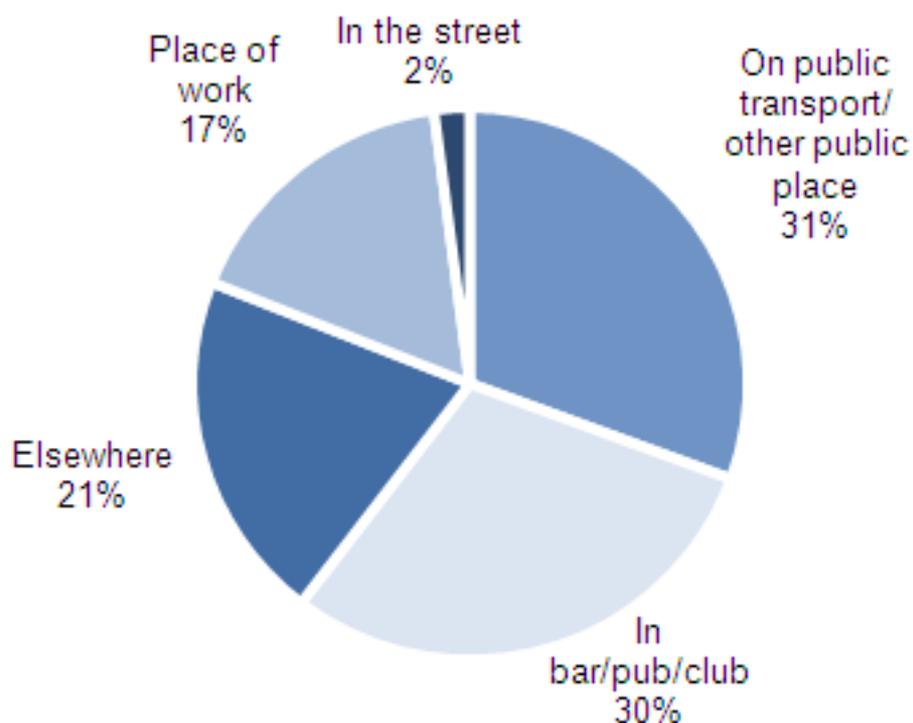
1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.

Download chart

[XLS](#) [XLS format](#)

(27.5 Kb)

Figure 2.12: Proportion of other personal theft incidents involving mobile phone theft by location of incident, 2011/12



Notes:

1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.

Download chart

[XLS](#) [XLS format](#)
(27.5 Kb)

Timing of theft by offence type

Around half of incidents of theft from the person/robbery involving a mobile phone took place during the week (52%), the other half at the weekend² (48%, [Appendix table 2.08 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)). This means a relatively high rate of incidents took place over the weekend (equivalent to 19.2% per weekend day) compared with the week (11.5% per week day) hence the likelihood of being a victim was higher at weekends.

Similarly, among incidents of mobile phone-related other personal theft, a similar proportion took place during the week (57%) and the weekend (43%). This is equivalent to 12.6% per week day and 17.4% per weekend day meaning that the likelihood of being victimised was again higher at the weekend.

Around a third of mobile phone theft incidents (theft from the person/robbery or other personal theft) took place in the afternoon (33% and 35% respectively) and around a third in the evening (33% and 31% respectively, [Appendix table 2.08 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#))³.

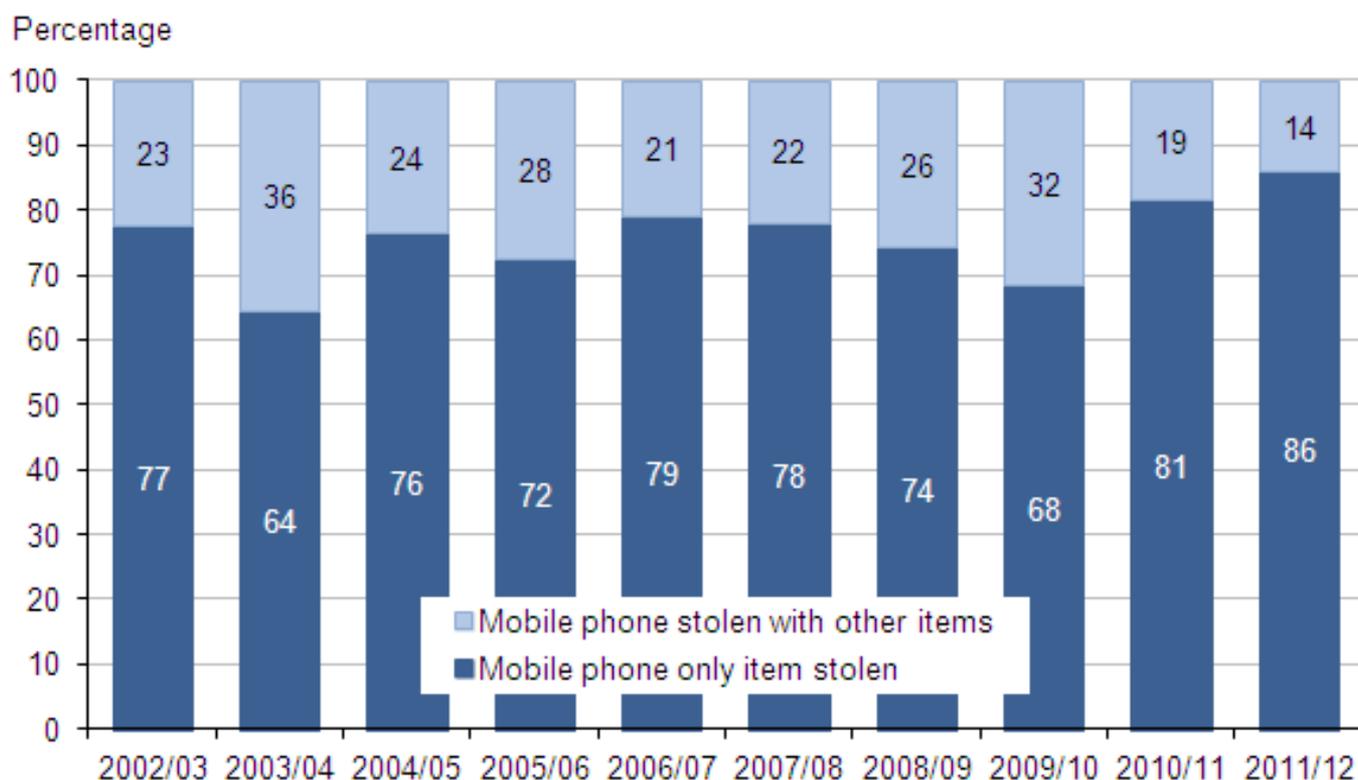
Items stolen by offence type

This analysis focuses on questions asked of theft from the person, robbery and other personal theft victims about what, if anything, had been stolen. As a result, the proportion of incidents that involved a mobile phone being stolen can be calculated and investigated by offence type.

Between the peak in the number of mobile phone theft incidents in the 2003/04 CSEW and the 2009/10 CSEW, around a third of theft from the person/robbery incidents have involved a mobile phone being stolen ([Appendix table 2.09 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)). Over the same period, in roughly 7 out of every 10 incidents where a mobile phone was stolen this was the only item stolen, suggesting that stealing the mobile phone may be the main driver for the offence taking place in the majority of cases (Figure 2.13).

Most recently the proportion of theft from the person/robbery incidents involving a mobile phone has increased from 31% (2010/11) to 46% (2011/12). The survey shows that over the same period there was an increase in the proportion of incidents where only a mobile phone was stolen (25% to 39%) and that a greater proportion of theft from the person/robbery incidents now involve only a mobile phone being stolen than at any other time in the past decade (86%, Figure 2.13 and [Appendix table 2.09 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)).

Figure 2.13: Trend in theft from the person/robbery incidents involving mobile phone theft, 2002/03 to 2011/12



Notes:

1. Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics.

Download chart

XLS [XLS format](#)

(29 Kb)

The CSEW shows that mobile phones were stolen in around 1 in 5 incidents of other personal theft and that this has been a fairly consistent trend since 2002/03. Over the same time frame there has been some variation in the proportion of incidents in which a mobile phone was the only item stolen, but for the last three years the survey has shown this to be in around 7 in 10 incidents of other personal theft ([Appendix table 2.09 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)).

[Appendix table 2.10 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) details the items stolen alongside a mobile phone when this was not the only item stolen (accounting for 14% of theft from the person/robbery incidents and 29% of other personal theft incidents in the 2011/12 CSEW):

- The most common items to be stolen with a mobile phone in theft from the person/robbery incidents were cash or a purse/wallet (7% of incidents respectively).
- Cash and a purse or wallet were also most commonly stolen with a mobile phone in incidents of other personal theft (23% and 21% respectively), but also a plastic card (19%) or bag (13%) suggesting that in at least some of these incidents the contents were stolen simply during a theft of an unattended bag.

Offender characteristics

The analysis that follows combines theft from the person, robbery and other personal theft incidents as the number of cases are too small to analyse by separate offence type. For these offence types, victims were able to say something about the offender in 45% of incidents of mobile phone thefts. And for those incidents where the victim was able to say something about the offender(s) ([Appendix table 2.11 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)):

- In half of incidents there was more than one offender (50%), including 1 in 5 incidents where there were 4 or more offenders.
- In 68% of incidents offender(s) were male (27% were female, 6% of both sexes).
- In 58% of incidents offender(s) were aged between 16 and 24 years.
- In three quarters of incidents (75%) the offender(s) were a stranger to the victim.

As seen in other crime types⁴, offender(s) in incidents of theft from the person, robbery and other personal theft involving mobile phones were more likely to be male (for example, 80% of violent offenders, 88% of burglary offenders). But the proportion of offender(s) in these mobile phone theft incidents who were female (27%) was higher than for other crime types (for example, 14% of violent offenders, 7% of burglary offenders).

Reporting of theft

Incidents of mobile phone theft are more likely to be reported to a network service provider than the police ([Appendix table 2.12 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)) although of course many incidents will have been reported to both.

The police came to know about two thirds of incidents of theft from the person/robbery involving mobile phones (66%), considerably higher than the reporting rate for theft from the person overall, where around a third (32%) of all incidents were reported to the police⁵.

Around 4 in 5 (81%) incidents of theft from the person/robbery were reported to a network service provider.

For incidents of other personal theft, half were reported to the police (52%) and three quarters were reported to the network service provider (75%).

Victims of mobile phone theft who did not report the theft to a network service provider were asked for any reasons why not. The analysis that follows combines theft from the person, robbery and other personal theft incidents as the number of cases where incidents of mobile phone theft were not reported are too small to analyse by separate offence type.

[Appendix table 2.13 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) shows that, overall, 25% of these incidents of mobile phone thefts were not reported to a network service provider. The main reasons given for not reporting were that:

- The phone was returned to the owner (43% of unreported incidents).
- It was a pay as you go phone (42% of unreported incidents).

Notes

1. A robbery offence is an incident in which force or threat of force is used in a theft or attempted theft from the person.
2. The CSEW categorises 'weekend' as being from 6pm on Friday to 6am on Monday.
3. The CSEW categorises 'afternoon' as being from noon to 6pm and the 'evening' from 6pm to midnight.
4. See [Crime Statistics, Nature of Crime tables, 2011/12](#).
5. See Table D13 in the Annual trend and demographic tables 2011-12 – [Crime in England and Wales, year ending March 2012](#).

Mobile phone security behaviours among 10 to 15 year olds

Since the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) was extended to children aged 10 to 15 in 2009, questions about ownership of mobile phones and security behaviours associated with use have been asked of this age group.

Levels of ownership among 10 to 15 year olds

Levels of ownership among 10 to 15 year olds are available from this data source which is separate to the data presented in the [Mobile phone ownership](#) section (where the adult respondent answers on behalf of everyone in the household). However, reported ownership levels are similar: from the questions specifically asked of 10 to 15 year olds, 84% said they owned a mobile phone (data not shown).

Safety precautions taken with mobile phones among 10 to 15 year olds

There are some actions that children could take if they were looking to protect their mobile phones when they were out and about. Children were asked whether they avoided using their phone in public, kept their phone hidden or out of sight, and whether they avoided using their phone in certain places (such as on public transport or at school). These data have been previously published by the Home Office¹ and figures here provide the latest update.

The majority of children carried out at least some of these precautionary behaviours for their mobile phones: very few (5% of mobile phone owning children) said they never did any of those things ([Appendix table 2.14 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)). There has been no statistically significant change in this proportion since the 2009/10 CSEW (4%) or the 2010/11 CSEW (3%).

Comparing the safety precautions that children said they took regarding their mobile phone in the 2009/10 survey with latest data from 2011/12 shows few statistically significant changes: overall, the picture is quite similar. However, there are a few noteworthy points ([Appendix table 2.15 \(829 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)):

- The proportion of girls who said they **sometimes** avoided using their mobile phone in public has fallen between 2009/10 and 2011/12 (from 26% to 20%) while the proportion of girls who said they **always** avoided using their phone in public has increased (from 6% to 10%).
- Between the 2009/10 and 2011/12 CSEW there was an increase in the proportion of boys who said they **never** avoided using their mobile phone in public (from 25% to 33%). This increase was most pronounced in boys aged 13 to 15 (from 26% to 39%),
- The proportion of children who kept their phone hidden or out of sight most of the time has decreased between 2009/10 (42%) and 2011/12 (35%) with the fall driven by those aged 13 to 15 (from 43% to 34%). Conversely children carrying out that safety precaution sometimes has increased over the same period (from 13% to 18% overall and from 13% to 21% among 13 to 15 year olds).

Items stolen in thefts among 10 to 15 year olds

Previously published tables for the 2011/12 CSEW provide information on the items stolen during incidents of thefts experienced by 10 to 15 year olds. A mobile phone was stolen in 1 in 5 incidents of theft experienced by children aged 10 to 15; the most common items stolen were bicycles (22% of theft incidents) and mobile phones (20%)².

Notes

1. See Chapter 3 in [Children's experience and attitudes towards the police, personal safety and public spaces: Findings from the 2009/10 British Crime Survey](#).
2. See Table 8.8 in Crime Statistics: Nature of Crime tables, 2011/12 - Children aged 10-15 – [Crime Statistics, Nature of Crime tables, 2011/12](#).

Background notes

1. If you have any queries regarding crime statistics for England and Wales please email crimestatistics@ons.gsi.gov.uk.
2. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

Copyright

© Crown copyright 2013

You may use or re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/ or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This document is also available on our website at www.ons.gov.uk.