Update:

Extending the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) to include fraud and cyber crime

15 June 2015
Summary
This report describes the progress made on a project led by the Crime Statistics and Analysis Team at the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The aim of the project is to develop new questions for inclusion in the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) that will capture victims’ experiences of fraud and cyber crime. The early development work was carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), with subsequent work being carried out by the CSEW survey contractors TNS-BMRB.

Introduction
Crime statistics are obtained from several sources, the two main ones being the CSEW and police recorded crime.

The CSEW was established in 1981 and ran at mostly two year intervals until 2001, when it became a continuous survey. It is a face-to-face victimisation survey in which people resident in households in England and Wales are asked about their experiences of a selected number of offences in the 12 months prior to the interview. It covers both adults aged 16 and over, and children aged 10 to 15, but does not cover those living in group residences (such as care homes, student halls of residence and prisons), or crimes against commercial or public sector bodies. For the population and offence types it covers, the CSEW is a valuable source of information providing robust estimates of both the number of incidents that occur and the number of victims.

The way in which crimes are identified has remained largely the same since the survey began, with respondents being asked a series of “screener questions” to determine whether or not they (or a member of their household) have experienced particular incidents that may amount to a crime in law. All those identified as potential victims of crime are then asked more detailed questions in the “victimisation module”. The purpose of the victimisation module is to capture more detailed information about the offence (such as when it took place) through an open description of what happened, as well as through multiple choice questioning.

The advantage of the CSEW is that it is able to capture all offences experienced by those interviewed, not just those that have been reported to, and recorded by, the police. It covers a broad range of victim-based crimes experienced by the resident household population. However, there are some serious but relatively low volume offences, such as homicide and sexual offences, which are not included in its main estimates. For more information on what the CSEW does and does not cover, see this infographic¹.

Whilst the consistency of the survey questions over time has been one of its great strengths, with the rise of the internet there have been concerns that the survey has failed to keep up with the changing nature of crime; the internet provides not only new means of committing established crimes, but also opportunities to undertake new types of crime.

Extending the CSEW for fraud and cyber crime

ONS established a project in early 2014 to explore the feasibility of covering fraud and cyber crime in the main crime survey estimates. A procurement exercise was undertaken during May 2014 and a contract awarded to NatCen in June 2014 to take work forward on the development of new questions to cover these types of crime. The contract with NatCen was funded by the Government Statistical Service Quality Improvement Fund.

Phases of the initial development work

The work by NatCen was split into three phases as follows:

Phase 1: Initial desk research to review current literature and existing international approaches.

This phase aimed to evaluate the range of methodologies and survey questions used on other national surveys for measuring the prevalence of victimisation from fraud and cyber crime. It also included the establishment of a “reference group” consisting of a number of experts in the field of fraud, cyber and online crime to discuss and facilitate question development. Overall, phase 1 informed the development of a number of prototype screener questions, designed to identify victims who have experienced different types of fraud and cyber crime.

Phase 2: Developing and cognitively testing prototype questions with a cross section of the public.

The cognitive testing aimed to capture people’s thought processes and understanding as they responded to the questions. In particular, it aimed to assess participants’ initial reaction to the new screening questions and a subset of questions from the victimisation module, exploring any difficulties participants had in responding or recalling events. The questions were tested by way of a face-to-face interview on 37 members of the public carried out through two rounds of testing – one in August 2014 and another in September 2014. As part of the testing, different forms of the new screener question wording were compared using a split sample design, whereby participants were asked one or other version of the questions so that responses could be compared.

Phase 3: Documenting all the work conducted in the first two phases and making final recommendations for further work to bridge the gap between the development process and the full launch of the questions on the survey in October 2015.

Phase 3 included final changes to the wording of the questions and suggested further testing. At the end of November 2014, NatCen submitted a final paper reporting on the results from all three phases. This is now published as a methodological note on the ONS website – ‘Developing questions on fraud and cyber crime for the CSEW’ 2. Following the work completed by NatCen, responsibility for the remainder of the project was passed back to ONS and the CSEW survey contractor (TNS-BMRB) to be progressed.

Subsequent work

Since the draft screener questions were developed by NatCen, TNS-BMRB have carried out further cognitive testing and piloting of the questions as recommended in the NatCen report,
including feedback being sought from the interviewers involved. This led to some minor amendments, as well as an additional update to the existing question about threats to ensure that going forward it also captures those who have experienced cyber threats. These amendments were followed by an earlier than expected soft launch of the screener questions into the live survey in April 2015, which are now being asked of all adult survey respondents. This launch involved the screener questions only; the victimisation module has not been added to the survey at this stage (see below).

The main body of victimisation module questions have been developed cognitively by TNS-BMRB (adapted from those currently asked of victims of traditional crimes). The information collected includes what contact the respondent had with the offender(s), details of financial loss, whether anyone was threatened etc. In the process of this work, a further consultation took place with experts in police recorded crime, Action Fraud and academics. The aim of this engagement was to ensure that the resulting questions will allow enough detail to be captured to enable the offence to be accurately coded in accordance with the Home Office Counting Rules.

The screener questions and victimisation module were piloted together in April 2015 as part of a truncated version of the survey, to assess whether they were understood as intended. Around 50 interviews were achieved which led to further minor amendments to the questions.

A large-scale field trial consisting of 2,000 interviews is now in progress after being launched in May 2015. This will continue until August 2015 and act as a full “dress rehearsal” of the main survey instrument to test how the screener and victimisation module questions work together in a live setting, and whether the survey instrument will capture the information necessary to accurately classify the incident as a particular crime type. The trial will be followed by a full analysis of the data, allowing us to evaluate any effect on response rates and the testing of a new offence coding system.

Next steps

Upcoming work:

- **October 2015** – Further to the incorporation of the screener questions into the live survey (in April 2015) and a successful field trial (currently in progress), the victimisation module questions will be introduced into the live survey from October 2015. Initially, only half of the sample will be asked the fully revised questionnaire to verify that there are no detrimental effects on the survey as a whole and that the historical time series is protected.

- **April 2016** - Roll-out of the new questions to the full sample.

Based on the first quarter’s worth of data from the screener questions incorporated into the survey in April 2015, we hope to publish high-level prevalence estimates in October 2015. Early thoughts are that these will be released as experimental statistics published alongside our standard quarterly bulletin. Following successful live implementation of the victimisation module in October 2015, it is then anticipated that a full suite of estimates based on both the screener questions and victimisation module will begin to emerge from around April 2016.
The findings from this work are being shared widely with the devolved administrations and across Government including with the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, the Scottish Government and the Ministry of Justice Northern Ireland.

Any comments or questions on this project should be directed to CrimeStatistics@ons.gsi.gov.uk.