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## Special Feature

### Use it or you lose it

British Society of Criminology Response to the Consultation: Changes to the Crime Survey for England and Wales

Andromachi Tseloni<sup>1</sup> and Pamela Davies<sup>2</sup>

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Dear Member,

You may - or may not - be aware that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has announced that, in the context of public sector financial constraints, the future level of funding for the CSEW will be reduced with effect from October 2017. Further to this, the ONS has drawn up a range of proposals to reduce the cost of the CSEW in 2017/18 and future years. There is a consultation on these proposals. It opens on 13 June 2017, runs for 6 weeks and closes on 23 July 2017. The consultation asks for responses on the following questions:

- What are your views on the proposed cost-savings?
- Of the proposed cost-saving options, which would you prefer ONS to adopt?

**Option A:** reduce target response rate (to 69%)

**Option B:** reduce sample size (by 1,800 interviews)

**Option C:** remove additional questions from CSEW to reduce survey to core questions required to produce quarterly crime estimates

**Option D:** mixed approach – reduce target response rate (to 71%) and reduce sample size (by 600 interviews)

- Is there a particular reason for your stated preference?
- What impact would these potential options have on your use of CSEW data?

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- Do you have any other comments?

The BSC will be coordinating a response and we urge you to send us your thoughts about the proposals. Creating an inventory of BCS members who use, have used in the past, plan to use or supervise research students whose work relies on the survey would also strengthen our case. Feel free to include such information if relevant to your work.

**Please direct your responses to Dr Helen Jones, [helen.jones@britsoccrim.org](mailto:helen.jones@britsoccrim.org)**

We would also urge you to consider responding directly – as individuals – and as collectives from your own academic departments, faculties, research groups, networks and professional bodies.

The consultation proposes ‘that all the following questions will be removed from the CSEW questionnaire from October 2017’:

- All questions in the ‘Performance of the Criminal Justice System’ module, excepting those related to the performance of the police.
- All questions in the ‘Experiences of the Criminal Justice System’ module
- All questions in the ‘Attitudes to the Criminal Justice System’ module

We strongly oppose this proposal. The public’s perceptions about the legitimacy, impartiality and efficiency of the criminal justice system form the basis of rule of law in modern democratic societies (Hough et al. 2013). The above modules offer the means for investigating, assessing and, since democracy cannot be taken for granted, re-assessing all these issues (see, for example, the work by Professor Mike Hough and colleagues: Bradford et al 2016; Hough and Roberts 2017). In addition it is imperative to document victims’ and witnesses’ experiences of and attitudes to the CJS, as elaborated below.

- Questions relating to victims’ experiences of the court system and use of victim services from the ‘Victimisation’ module.

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We strongly oppose this proposal. Victims should be offered the opportunity to voice their views and give their reaction to victimisation and, moreover, to appraise the services which in principle are in place to assist them.

Removal of the question on reaction to crime (EMOTREAC and WHEMOTA-L) is a retrograde step. It will take criminology back a few decades and re-affirm the belief that the only non-physical or financial impact flowing from criminal victimisation is fear. This feeds the fear and risk monster (Featherstone et al. 2016) and diverts attention away from the range of negative and debilitating emotions experienced by victims. It also diminishes the wealth of information that is being amassed on the impacts of crime and victimisation across immigrant sub-groups, rich data which can be used for better understand reporting patterns (Ignatans et al. 2016).

The way the current CSEW questionnaire is structured denies victims who (should or need to) use or have used the Criminal Justice System and victim services the most the opportunity to appraise them. Indeed the CSEW 'Victimisation' module in its entirety (Long Form) is currently completed for *up to three individual crimes* experienced by each victim (Tilley and Tseloni 2016: 86). Moreover these three crimes that each victim is allowed to relate to the survey should not be part of the same series crimes (of which more will said later, Farrell and Pease 2007).

To give a health analogy the way the current CSEW methodology operates is as if a patient could only appraise the health services she has received for up to three non-related health problems within the previous twelve months. Surely the more one is in need of healthcare the more the said healthcare's quality and effectiveness in dealing with the illness matters to her in terms of affecting her quality of life and ability to fulfil her personal, family, professional, social and financial goals. In addition repeat requests for health care for the same illness may imply that the care received is ineffective in curing or containing the illness. In this vein victims of multiple crimes and /or series crimes, who (are expected to) have used the CJS and victim support services the most, know best whether these services are helpful and what improvements would meet multiple and series victims' needs to eventually keep them out of harm. Obliterating or diminishing these victims' voices is surely counterproductive. The funding of victim support and services – at national, regional and local levels - surely needs to be underpinned by a strong evidence base.

Baseline data from the CSEW has been pivotal in ensuring that victims' needs are increasingly known about and that, in climates of scarce resources, support and service provision is dispersed according to broadly established risks to crime and vulnerability to victimisation.

Since the seminal work by Ken Pease and colleagues on repeat victimisation (Farrell and Pease 1993) there is still a lot we do not understand on how to prevent it. The CSEW uses a cap on six crimes per victim and only counts five incidents within series crimes – counting rules which have arguably distorted domestic violence trends (Farrell and Pease 2007; Tilley and Tseloni 2016; Walby et al. 2016). Repeat victimisation and crimes have not reduced during the crime drop for most volume crime types (Thorpe 2007). If anything the same population groups are relatively more burdened now than before the crime drop (Hunter and Tseloni 2016; Ignatans and Pease 2016a). Series crimes - defined in the CSEW as more than one incident of the same crime type that occurred under similar circumstances and committed most likely by the same offender(s) - now account for an astonishing 39% of all crime (Ignatans and Pease 2016b). This is an indication that those who are most in need of effective crime prevention intervention do not receive it arguably due to lack of a pool of research-informed interventions. Indeed national level research on what may prevent repetition is lacking due to data issues. For example, analysing the Victimisation module data for crime prevention purposes (Tseloni et al. 2017) exposed a set of research – informed preventive measures which have since successfully been piloted (Tseloni 2016). Tilley and Tseloni (2016) overview how the CSEW can be improved to allow research-informed policy recommendations, including protecting repeat victims.

Therefore we counter-propose to keep these questions and in fact *expand them in more than three Victimisation modules per victim* together with all other long Victimisation module questions that are currently omitted from the Victimisation module given to victims of more than three un-related crimes within a year.

According to the consultation additional cost savings are required which may be achieved by any of the three proposed approaches or a fourth which combines of the

last two, as seen in the beginning of this article. The first three, including their justification and our response, are discussed below:

### **A) Removing other questions from the survey**

'The principal aim of the CSEW is to ask respondents about their experiences of a range of crimes in order to produce estimates of the trends in those crimes over time. However, it also asks questions on other crime-related issues such as anti-social behaviour, attitudes toward the police, drug use and perceptions of the risk of crime. Removing these additional questions would generate cost savings by reducing the average interview length.'

We disagree. The CSEW was originally instigated (as The British Crime Survey) in 1981 to offer a theory testing and policy informing tool that was welcome by the international criminology community (Hough and Mayhew 1983). It was viewed as an improvement to the USA's National Crime Survey of the time which aimed to just produce estimates of crime levels and trends (Tilley and Tseloni 2016). Therefore all the proposed additional questions for removal are essential to the survey's original purpose. Let's take them in turn.

*Experiencing and / or witnessing anti-social behaviour (ASB)* is important because:

- (a) ASB forms a large part of police activity, requiring research-informed prevention to improve lives and reduce police activity that is reactive and costly
- (b) "Those who had experienced ASB were twice as likely to be victims of crime in the same year compared to those who had not experienced ASB." (Thompson et al. 2017) Indeed all types of ASB except vehicle-related are significantly associated with crime victimisation (Ward et al. 2017).

*Attitudes toward the police* are closely related to assessing police performance. People with negative attitudes towards the police will tend to undervalue police performance and vice versa in the absence of a life-changing personal experience with police that would question one's beliefs. Therefore it makes no sense to keep one set of questions and remove the other. In addition the police are part of the

criminal justice system and their legitimacy has to be assessed and re-assessed within a democracy (Jackson and Hough 2013; Hough et al. 2016).

*Drug use* is among the highest risk factors of experiencing violence by strangers or by acquaintances, a term that includes all victims' (regular or not) contacts except partners, ex-partners or household members (NTU 2016).

*Perceptions of the risk of crime* may be gauged via a different, say, public attitudes survey. However despite the results of descriptive analyses these perceptions are linked to actual crime experiences. To elaborate, fear of crime had little or no policy relevance until the BCS. The theoretical concept is problematic and also entails certain assumptions about alleged victims' powerlessness (Ditton et al. 1999). Yet measuring people's crime perceptions can inform public reassurance initiatives. The late Jason Ditton and colleagues have extensively tested different variants for capturing anxiety about victimisation (Farrall and Ditton 1999). They recommended improvements to these questions and perhaps including them within a general social attitudes survey rather than the crime survey (for example, see Ditton and Farrall 2007; Gray et al. 2008). More recent work showed that perceived crime risk is indeed highly linked to victimisation, repeat victimisation and area crime levels (Brunton-Smith and Sturgis 2011).

Overall removing these questions will deprive the research community from reliable measurements of significant correlates of crime, and thus research informed crime prevention.

### **B) Reducing the response rate**

'Over the last ten years, the CSEW has maintained a relatively high response rate of between 72% and 75% (with the exception of 2014/15 when a 70% response rate was recorded). Maintaining such a high response rate is only possible through interviewers making repeated visits, particularly to households who are difficult to contact. Making less effort to achieve such a high response rate will generate savings. We estimate that dropping the response rate to 69% will be sufficient to make up the funding shortfall.'

Hard to reach population groups suffer more crime but they do not necessarily include hard to reach CSEW respondents, i.e., individuals in private accommodation, who might simply be unavailable for interview. In our view this option can be considered after testing that whether hard to reach respondents are not significantly more victimised than others. Based on a dated research the number of calls for securing an interview, as an indicator of guardianship, is an independent risk factor for domestic burglary but not for household theft, criminal damage or vehicle crime. An additional interviewer's call is associated with a 3.5% more burglaries reported by the household's respondent when eventually reached (Osborn and Tseloni 1998). If for all other crimes than burglary, for which increased number of calls directly links to low guardianship, hard to reach individuals are not at higher risk of being victimised than others we would not object to reducing response rates to the proposed 69%.

### **C) Reducing the sample size**

'The achieved sample size is currently 35,000 households per year. Making a small reduction (of around 1,800) in the sample size will generate sufficient cost savings by reducing the amount of fieldwork required.'

We would not opt for this solution. On the contrary we would recommend retaining or increasing the sample size for achieving Police Force Area level sample representatives. Performance of the police questions, which will be retained according to the consultation document, can be useful when combined with victims' experiences. Since crime is a rare event in the general population this requires large enough samples at Police Force Area level, therefore *more investment* rather than cuts in the CSEW budget. The requisite funding may be accrued from savings to Police and Crime Commissioners budgets from removing their obligation to commission local victim surveys. Usually undertaken by commercial companies, these local victim satisfaction surveys fall extremely below the standards of the CSEW and the ONS (Tilley and Tseloni 2016: 85). They are kept away from the scrutiny and potential analysis of the research community and therefore cannot provide any criminological insights or directions for police activity and policy. Incorporating therefore this element of police performance within the CSEW

questionnaire and appropriate sample sizes at Police Force Area level will produce savings to local police budgets and independent research - informed local police operations.

With regards to those already underrepresented in the CSEW there had been a comprehensive 4-year programme of work initiated in 2016, to, amongst other improvements, increase the coverage of the CSEW and therefore improve its estimates of the nature and extent of victimisation. The child survey, a relatively new development, was to be further developed to include questions around cybercrime, 'sexting' and online bullying and grooming. At the other end of the age spectrum the self-completion module only asks respondents up to the age of 59. A pilot on this upper age cap was explored from October 2016 with a view to a more comprehensive coverage of age and victimisation. With an aging population we need to know about how to protect those at risk in institutions and their own homes in older age and possibly expand the sample frame to include elderly care homes. In sum the proposed cuts would severely curtail the emerging gender-age dimensions to sexual violence and coercive control and abuse.

On balance **reducing the response rate** after confirming via split sample testing that the response bias created is non-directional (those left out are not more victimised than respondents in the achieved sample) looks like the least damaging solution. It will however damage the CSEW's world leading place and reputation – the CSEW is the only national crime survey that has furnished research conducted and informing criminological theory, policy and practice outside the UK national boundaries.

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