

Consultation on the British Crime Survey intimate personal violence questionnaire

A split-sample experiment was carried out on the 2010/11 British Crime Survey (BCS) self-completion module on intimate personal violence (IPV) which is used to estimate victimisation of domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking. This compared the current question set, used to measure victimisation in the BCS since 2004/05, with an alternative question set, added to the survey in April 2010. Details of the experiment as well as analysis of results can be found on the Home Office website: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research/research-statistics/crime/crime-statistics/bcs-methodology/>

This analysis identified a number of key issues in the comparison between the current and alternative question sets in the BCS IPV module.

- The alternative question set produced generally higher estimates of IPV victimisation than the current question set, though it is difficult to conclude which of the two produce more valid results.
- The alternative question set produced lower estimates of serious sexual assault victimisation which may be due to the use of a screener question.
- There may be an element of reporting experiences that would not be considered IPV in the higher estimates from the alternative question set, particularly the stalking and less serious sexual assault questions.
- The alternative question set provides a better experience for respondents, being easier to answer.
- There is little difference between the two sets of questions in other survey effects, such as time taken to complete, asking for help and response rate to the 10 to 15 year olds survey.

The Home Office is launching a public consultation on changes to the BCS IPV module from April 2012. Any change will also need to take into consideration the issue of how to treat trend data. The current questions have a continuous trend since 2004/05. These trend data are valuable in assessing changes in victimisation over time.

- Stalking was not included in the 2007/08 BCS IPV module, therefore current trend data do not include stalking in the overall measures of any domestic abuse, any partner abuse or any family abuse.
- Changing to the alternative questions would result in a break in this trend and direct comparisons of data before and after the break point would not be possible.
- By April 2012, there will be two years of split-sample data available. These data could be used to quantify the change in rates between the two question sets and provide an approximation for assessing changes over time across the break point. However, changing question wording further would limit the effectiveness of such an approach.

The Home Office is seeking any comments and views from users of these statistics on the following specific issues.

Choice of question set used for intimate personal violence module in future

Estimates from both the 'current' and 'alternative' question sets have been published here alongside analysis of the differences between the two sets of questions.

- Which of the question sets should be used in the BCS from April 2012 onwards?

Amendments to questions

Whichever question set is favoured going forwards, the analysis published here may indicate that further amendments to questions are needed in future.

- Specifically, if the alternative question set is favoured there is the issue of the inclusion of a filter question before the most explicit questions on serious sexual assault. This was intended to reduce offence to respondents which may have impacted on the parental refusal rate to the BCS extension to 10 to 15 year olds. Given that the addition of a filter question to the most explicit questions in serious sexual assault has not resulted in a reduction in the parental refusal rate to the 10 to 15 survey, should this filter be retained?
- If the alternative question set is favoured then are further amendments needed to minimise the risk of reporting experiences that should not be classed as IPV? Should these be limited to the stalking questions, less serious sexual assault questions or to others?
- Are there any other amendments suggested for consideration in the module in future?

Publication of time-series data

If the alternative question set is used from April 2012 onwards, there are additional issues around the publication of time-series data.

- Is a full break in the BCS time series acceptable in exchange for the possibility of improved coverage of victimisation using the alternative question set?
- Should an attempt be made to adjust past estimates to make them comparable with estimates from the alternative question set using the split-sample data? Would this risk causing inaccurate comparisons to be made over time?

Responses to this consultation should be sent to the address below (by post or email) by 7 October 2011. Individual responses will be published unless respondents request anonymity. These will be published together with a statement setting out our future approach alongside *Supplementary Volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales 2010/11* in January 2012.

Crime Statistics Programme
Home Office Statistics
5th Floor Peel
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

crimestats@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk