Female offenders and child dependents

Ministry of Justice

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Previous estimates of the proportion of female offenders who have child dependents at the time of their disposal have been based on small-sample survey data rather than robust administrative information. The availability of linked data from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Ministry of Justice has, for the first time, enabled analysis of data on Child Benefit take-up and sentencing for criminal offences, providing a better estimate of the proportion of female offenders with child dependents.

This ad-hoc management information bulletin presents the analysis on the percentage of female offenders with child dependents, and the average number of child dependents in their care at the time of their disposal.

The analysis is based on linked data from the police national computer (PNC) and DWP benefits data. It is an extension of the work presented in *Experimental statistics from the 2013 MoJ /DWP /HMRC data share: Linking data on offenders with benefit, employment and income data*, published on 30 January 2014.

Table 1 provides an estimate of the percentage of female offenders with one or more child dependents and the number of child dependents in their care. A child dependent is defined as a child under 18, living in the care of an adult.

The linked data was used to identify female offenders who made a child benefit claim at the time of their disposal (caution or conviction) in 2012. This information was used to provide a minimum and maximum estimate for the percentage of offenders with child dependents in their care. The real value is predicted to fall somewhere within this range. The child benefit data also provided information on the number of child dependents associated with each claim (see annex for further details of the methods used).

Key results

- Between 24% and 31% of all female offenders were estimated to have one or more child dependents.

  In comparison, the 2011 census[1] showed that 36% of households with a female adult had dependent children.

- On average, those with child dependents had 1.9 children.

  Office for National Statistics figures show that the average number of dependent children per family [2] in 2012 was 1.7.

- Female offenders aged 25 to 44 were most likely to have child dependents.

- Among the different disposal types, women receiving immediate custody were significantly less likely to have child dependents (between 13% and 19%).

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[1] www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/DC1112EWla

[2] www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/family-size/2012/family-size-rpt.html

Table 1: Percentage of female offenders in 2012 with one or more child dependents and the mean number of child dependents in their care at the time of their disposal

	Number of female offenders (18+) with disposal in 2012[3]	Percentage of female offenders with one or more child dependents		Mean number of child dependents - *if one or more*
		Matched with claim (Min Bound)	Upper estimate (Max Bound)	
Total	**109,166**	**24%**	**31%**	**1.9**
Ethnicity				
White	91,243	24%	31%	1.9
Non-white	10,828	22%	30%	2.0
Unknown	7,095	27%	40%	2.1
Age				
18-20	13,253	3%	4%	1.3
21-24	17,073	16%	21%	1.6
25-34	33,234	34%	44%	2.1
35-44	24,571	36%	46%	2.0
45-54	15,128	20%	26%	1.5
55+	5,907	3%	4%	1.3
Disposal Type[4]				
Caution	38,154	25%	33%	2.0
Conditional Discharge	11,503	28%	34%	2.0
Fine	22,141	24%	30%	1.8
Community Penalty	15,653	27%	33%	1.9
Suspended Sentence	5,423	29%	35%	2.0
Immediate Custody	5,622	13%	19%	1.8
Other	10,384	18%	27%	1.9
Offence Class[4]				
Violence against the person	6,151	29%	35%	2.0
Theft and handling stolen goods	22,011	20%	27%	1.9
Fraud and forgery	5,616	28%	37%	2.0
Drug offences	7,158	25%	31%	1.8
Other indictable offences	3,459	18%	26%	1.8
Summary offences exc. motoring	36,436	28%	35%	2.0
Summary motoring offences	10,864	26%	32%	1.8
Breach offences	2,943	19%	25%	1.8

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[3] These figures are based on a 2015 PNC extract and may therefore slightly differ from 2012 published statistics.

[4] Where sub-categories contained fewer than 1000 offenders (based on the PNC snapshot) data is not shown. These include, from Disposal Type: Absolute discharge; and Offence Class: Sexual Offences, Burglary, Robbery, Criminal Damage, Indictable motoring offences, Unknown offences. Offences outside England and Wales were also excluded from the Offence Class sub-category.

ANNEX - METHODS

This analysis is based on linked data from the police national computer (PNC) and DWP benefits data that identifies offenders who made a claim for either child, housing and council tax benefits or national tax credits (working tax credits and child tax credits) between 2008-2013. Here, the analysis focuses on child benefit claims made in 2012. The figures for the total number of offenders on the PNC in 2012 are based on a more recent 2015 extract from the PNC as offenders not linked to a claim were not recorded in the original linked dataset.

The total number of female offenders, in each sub-category, aged 18 or over at the time of their disposal in 2012, is shown in the first column of the results table.

The linked data identified female offenders (aged 18+) in each sub-category, who were making a child benefit claim with start and end dates spanning their disposal date (caution or conviction) in 2012.

The number of children associated with each claimant was identified in the benefit records. The mean of this value is shown in the last column of the results table. (In approximately 1% of claim records where no child number was shown these were excluded from the calculation of this average.)

This analysis assumes that the female parent in a partnership will register a child benefit claim. The minimum bound estimate for the percentage of female offenders with one or more child dependents was determined by the ratio of those matched to a child benefit claim and the total population recorded on the PNC. This value may be regarded as a minimum estimate because it assumes that only those females identified with a child benefit claim have child dependents. Note that a further implicit assumption is that fraudulent claims (in which no child dependent exists) are not significant in number and that therefore a child benefit claim is substantively representative of the claimant having a child dependent.

It is likely that a higher number of offenders may have child dependents and this is represented by the upper estimate which takes into account reasons why the matched figure may have underestimated the proportions with child dependents:

a) It is estimated that 96% of those eligible make a child benefit claim (HMRC, Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit, Take-up rates, 2012-13). The matched claim rate was therefore increased by a further factor 1/0.96.

b) Not all offenders registered on the PNC had ever been linked to a benefit claim. The linked benefits data set spanned four types of benefits over 2008-2013 and approximately 80% of all offenders with records on the PNC in 2012 were linked to some kind of claim. It is unclear whether an offender that remained unlinked had never made a claim or if linking was unachievable due to other missing data. Therefore the upper estimate reflects the proportion of females making a claim relative to the linked population totals (approximately 80% of the PNC total although this varied within sub-categories). The same proportion is assumed to persist in the unmatched population.

We expect the real figure to lie between the minimum and maximum estimates provided.

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