



Home Office

Consultation on the British Crime Survey Intimate Personal Violence questionnaire: Response from Home Office Statistics

January 2012

Consultation on the British Crime Survey Intimate Personal Violence questionnaire: Response from Home Office Statistics

1. Introduction

Home Office Statistics launched a 13-week consultation alongside the publication of the experimental statistics from the intimate personal violence questionnaire on the British Crime Survey (BCS). The consultation period ended on 14 October 2011 and this document provides a summary of the responses to the consultation and an outline of actions and decisions taken, or to be taken.

2. Background

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 the results, can be found on the Home Office website:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/consult-bcs-ipvq-2011/>

This analysis identified a number of key issues in the comparison between the current and alternative question sets in the BCS IPV module. The Home Office launched 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 as the current questions (with the exception of questions on stalking) have a continuous trend since 2004/05.

3. Responses to the consultation

A total of 15 responses to the consultation paper were received, from national charities and independent research institutions.¹ The individual responses are published alongside this paper as outlined in the consultation document. A summary of responses to key questions is given below, but it should be noted that not all respondents provided a response to all the questions raised in the consultation paper. Furthermore, a wide range of comments on additional areas were received and it is not possible to respond to each of these here.

Consultation question 1: Choice of question set used for IPV in future

Estimates from both the 'current' and 'alternative' question sets were published 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?*

Ten respondents favoured using the 'alternative' question set. Only one respondent favoured keeping the 'current' set as they thought changing it would make comparisons with other surveys using the same questions difficult.

¹ Responses are available here <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/consult-bcs-ipvq-2011/responses-bcs-ipvq-0112>

Consultation question 2: Amendments to questions

Whichever question set is favoured going forwards, the analysis published previously 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 year old survey, should this filter be retained?

Eleven respondents favoured dropping the filter question and two respondents favoured keeping it.

- 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?

Eight respondents gave suggestions for amendments to questions. These were:

1. Clarify the question on whether the respondent was prevented from 'having their fair share of household money' by asking who contributes to and controls the household money.

Home Office Statistics response: This would require additional questions, increasing the length of the interview and respondent burden.

2. Use softer terms in the preambles: for example, 'sexual abuse' rather than 'rape'.

Home Office Statistics response: One of the purposes of the preamble is to give the respondent an informed view of the questions that are coming next. Given the graphic nature of question contained in the sexual assault questions, it is felt that it would be worse to give a misleading impression of the questions and the type of the language used contained in that section of the questionnaire.

3. Give more context to questions regarding sexual assaults and stalking: for example, include the qualifier 'causing fear, distress or alarm' (suggested by two respondents).

Home Office Statistics response: This qualifier is being included in the alternative question set in the 2012-13 questionnaire.

4. Include further questions to clarify who the harasser was in order to be able to distinguish between 'known' and 'stranger' violence.

Home Office Statistics response: Adding further questions for all types of intimate violence is not feasible due to limits on questionnaire length. However, we will consider adding this type of question in the future into the 'follow up' set of questions.²

5. Add in "was this from a partner, ex-partner or someone who thought they had a relationship with you, even if you did not?" after each of the stalking and less serious sexual assault questions (suggested by three respondents).

² In addition to the IPV questions discussed in this consultation, a set of follow-up questions are included in the IPV module in the BCS. These alternate annually between questions on the nature of partner abuse and the nature of serious sexual assault

Home Office Statistics response: This would need to be a separate question in order to remain consistent with what is accepted to mean by the term partner and how it has been used previously in the BCS. It may be possible in the future to have a set of follow up questions on the nature of stalking, which could include this. However, it would need careful consideration as it might be difficult for the respondent to judge if this is the case and the numbers might be very small.

6. One respondent was concerned that stalking and harassment are defined legally as a 'course of conduct' which the questions do not refer to and suggested the addition of the word "repeated/ly" to remedy this.

Home Office Statistics response: The definition of stalking is being amended to encompass the repeat element. The alternative question set on stalking in the 2012-13 questionnaire will include a phrase such as 'more than once'.

- *Are there any other amendments suggested for consideration in the module in future?*

Nine respondents gave suggestions for other amendments to the module in the future:

1. Include questions to differentiate the gender of the perpetrator (four respondents).

Home Office Statistics response: The gender of the perpetrator is currently collected in the follow-up questions.

2. Split questions covering more than one type of abuse to give as detailed a response as possible (two respondents).

Home Office Statistics response: This would add a large number of questions, it may be possible to add these to follow up questions in the future.

3. Introduce greater sensitivity in question wording: for example, the introduction to sexual offences questions states "Although the questions may seem quite intrusive, they are important...". One respondent was not convinced that 'intrusive' is the most sensitive word to be using in this context.

Home Office Statistics response: We will consider whether there is a more appropriate phrase.

4. Collect data on *how many* incidents (parallel to the main face-to-face part of the BCS), so that it is possible to count frequency of incidents as well as to measure prevalence (four respondents).

Home Office Statistics response: This information is already collected in the follow-up questions.

5. Include questions to identify post-separation violence (two respondents).

Home Office Statistics response: This is not an option for the main suite of prevalence questions but could be considered for the follow-up questions on partner abuse.

6. Broaden definition of IPV to include forced marriage.

Home Office Statistics response: As a general population survey, the BCS is not well suited to try to measure issues that are concentrated within small subsamples of the population and for which few, if any, respondents would report in the survey.

7. Enable differentiation between perpetrator and victim, for example, when the original victim retaliates and becomes a perpetrator.

Home Office Statistics response: We will consider the feasibility of this further.

8. Differentiate between minor and severe injury using the categories: assaults with no physical injury; assaults with minor injury; assaults with major injury.

Home Office Statistics response: We will consider the feasibility of this further.

9. Ask module of people aged 60 and over.

Home Office Statistics response: This was trialled for six months in the 2008/09 survey. It was found that the time taken to complete the self-completion module for this age group was longer than younger age groups, the response rate was significantly lower (increasing the risk of non-response bias) and prevalence amongst those aged 60 to 65 was relatively low. This means that the additional number of victims interviewed was relatively small compared to the increase in interviewer time. As a result, it was not continued.

10. Include questions to find out whether victims are recalling and referencing the most serious incident, the last incident, or a series of abusive incidents and include questions to isolate specific relationships - respondents may be drawing on incidents from more than one relationship, and these relationships may have been very different in terms of the nature and frequency of abuse.

Home Office Statistics response: Many of the follow up questions stipulate in the question wording to think about either the most recent incident of abuse or the most recent abusive partner. This could be applied to all of the questions in this section of the module and will be considered for the future rounds of questionnaire development.

11. Include questions on IPV or include 'partner' as a category for violent and threatening behaviours on the 10-15 survey.

Home Office Statistics response: During the development of the 10-15 survey it was decided that it would not be practical to include questions, for example of parental abuse, in the context of a survey conducted in the family home. However, partner abuse is already an answer category in the survey.

One respondent expressed concerns regarding language difficulties, confidentiality of responses and provision of information by interviewers on relevant support agencies. These issues are all covered by the survey field procedures as described in the survey technical report.

Several respondents gave suggestions for changes to the analysis of the IPV module which are outside the remit of this consultation.

Consultation question 3: 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?*

The majority of responses (eleven out of the twelve given) were clear that a full break was acceptable, but one respondent preferred not to have a break in the time-series (although no specific reason was given).

- *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?*

Where an answer was given to this question, the majority thought that, if possible, this attempt to adjust past estimates should be made, but with the caveat that the limitations of the comparisons should be made clear. One respondent thought adjustments should not be made as it would confuse matters.

4. The way forward

The general consensus from the consultation favours:

- **Using the alternative question set with a few amendments;**
 - include the qualifier 'causing fear, distress or alarm' in the first question referring to sexual offences (NIPV17, NIPV23)
 - adding the term 'more than once' to the stalking questions
- **Dropping the filter question (NIPV35) before the most explicit questions on serious sexual assault;**
- **Having a full break in the trend data, presenting adjusted past estimates where possible to make them more comparable.**

Any changes to the BCS have to take into account that while additional specialist modules and questions can be included at a relatively low cost, interview length means that such topics cannot be explored in as much detail as in a specialist survey.

Home Office will use these responses to inform decisions to be taken about possible changes to the IPV module. The 2012-13 BCS will continue with the split-sample in order to produce comparable measures for time-series adjustments.

Finally, Home Office Statistics would like to thank all the organisations and people who responded to the consultation for their valuable input to the choice of questions in the BCS IPV module.