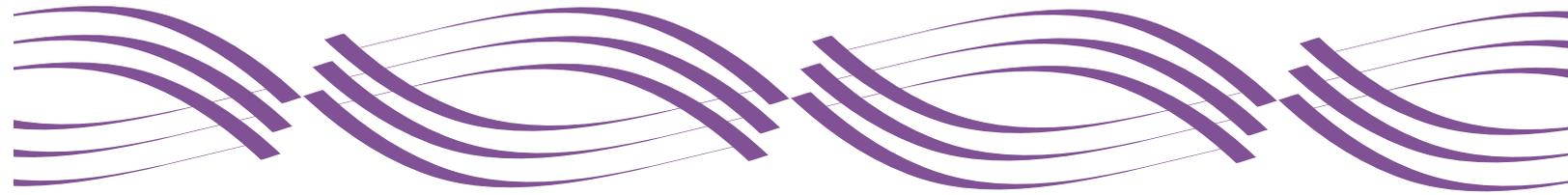


# Statistics Commission



Report No. 30

Crime Statistics: User Perspectives

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Report No. 30

## Crime Statistics: User Perspectives

September 2006

## Report by the Statistics Commission

Incorporating: Review of Crime Statistics  
by Matrix Research and Consultancy  
and Professor Tim Hope

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# Preface

## By the Chairman of the Statistics Commission

To produce a report on crime statistics is to travel a crowded road, one that may be in danger of intellectual grid-lock as ever more views from experts, commentators and the media run up against one another. Thus our decision to produce this report at this time may require some explanation, and perhaps justification.

The Statistics Commission exists to help ensure official statistics are trustworthy and responsive to public needs. Crime statistics are the quintessential 'official figures', a measure both of society and of government, telling us something about the social hazards we face and something about the success of government and public services in containing those hazards. How much the figures tell us about either the hazards or their containment is hotly debated.

There is no magic formula that will turn crime figures into the perfect tool for either purpose. Nonetheless they remain important and influential, permeating decision-making across central and local government, the police and all levels of society. They inform everything from broad social policy to decisions we make as individuals on where to live, whether to go out at night or let our children play outside.

This report is the third in a series that the Statistics Commission has produced, each looking at a major area of social or economic policy. Our approach is to consider the perspectives of a spectrum of users of the statistics – users in the sense of organisations or people who need information of this kind to inform their decisions. It is only when statistics are used to inform decisions that we regard them as earning their keep. If they are good enough for the purposes that users want to put them to then they are probably good enough – there is no benchmark of absolute quality. If they are not good enough for those purposes then users need to be told and, where practical, improvements made.

As a generalisation, if statistics are not trusted they are not useful. In our Interim Report in December 2005, we noted that broad statistical messages about crime – the ones most of us look for most of the time – are being lost against a backdrop of confused reporting; and this confusion is both a cause and a consequence of a lack of trust. The need to promote greater trust is thus central to this report.

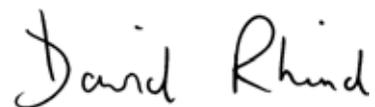
Our conclusions and recommendations are based on work we commissioned from Matrix Research and Consultancy, whose report to us is reproduced in full in Part 2. This in turn drew on the views of many leading experts in the field to whom we are indebted. In Part 1, we have however placed our own emphasis on various points, taking account of the Commission's views on the development of official statistics more generally. We make a small number of broad recommendations which we believe will help to increase trust, enhance communication and address some specific concerns about data availability and quality. These are the priorities for action and we will be pursuing them with the Home Office and others as appropriate.

Our recommendations are developmental rather than radical, but taken together with the Government's current proposals to legislate to put the governance of the whole statistical system on a statutory footing, they offer a practical way forward.

In January 2006, the then Home Secretary set up a cross-party working group, under the chairmanship of Professor Adrian Smith, to review, and advise Ministers on, how crime statistics should be compiled and published. We have stayed in touch with this group whilst developing our own independent report. Once Professor Smith's group reports we will respond publicly and constructively to their conclusions.

More recently, in July 2006, the report *From Improvement to Transformation*, an action plan for reform of the Home Office, was published. This noted the importance of accurate information. It undertook to 'streamline the statistics published' and to focus on 'producing timely and accurate information'. We see no tension between this commitment and our own recommendations as long as the streamlined statistics address the information needs of society, and not just those of the department.

I would like to thank all those who contributed over many months to this report, particularly Commission member Martin Weale, who chaired the project board, and Matrix Research and Consultancy who undertook much of the work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Rhind". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Chairman, Statistics Commission  
September 2006

# **Crime Statistics: User Perspectives**

## **PART 1**

**Report by the Statistics Commission**



## Introduction

1. This report looks at official statistics on crime. It considers who uses the statistics, for what purposes, whether the available statistics meet those purposes, and whether further statistical sources or outputs might need to be developed.
2. This is the third in a series of reports by the Statistics Commission that examine statistics in a specific area of social or economic policy from the perspective of users – previous reports have covered statistics on health and on school education.
3. Part 1 is the Commission's own report. It builds on our earlier Interim Report<sup>1</sup>, and draws extensively on a detailed *Review of Crime Statistics* conducted on our behalf by Matrix Research and Consultancy (the 'Consultancy Review') which forms Part 2.
4. The Consultancy Review makes a number of specific recommendations which we have taken into account in determining our views within the Commission. They can be found in their original form on page 95 and readers are encouraged to consider them alongside our own recommendations.
5. Within Part 1:
  - **Section 1** lists the Commission's recommendations.
  - **Section 2** outlines the background – in particular the Consultancy Review and the Commission's Interim Report.
  - **Section 3** sets out the rationale for each of the recommendations.

## SECTION 1: RECOMMENDATIONS

6. The Commission's recommendations follow four main themes: **structural separation** between Home Office policy functions and the compilation and publication of crime statistics; **improved communication** with users through clearer presentation of the statistics at the time of publication; **better, more consistent, crime data for small areas**, through more systematic exploitation of existing police data sources; and **further technical research** on options where the existing statistics do not fully meet demand – including the best measure of 'total crime', and ways to improve inter-administration (within the UK) comparisons of crime statistics.

<sup>1</sup> *Crime Statistics: Users Perspectives*. Interim Report. Statistics Commission, December 2005

**Recommendation 1:** Responsibility for the compilation and publication of crime statistics should be located at arm's length from Home Office policy functions and with clear accountability within the evolving framework of the government statistical service.

**Recommendation 2:** Treasury and Home Office Ministers should consider together a fully developed business case for moving responsibility for the British Crime Survey to the Office for National Statistics and should publish their agreed view with supporting arguments.

**Recommendation 3:** The Home Office, and others as appropriate, should make changes to the presentation of the recorded crime figures in order to communicate better the main messages. These steps include:

- changing the definition of violent crime;
- greater distinction between British Crime Survey results and police recorded crime data and the uses for which each source is appropriate;
- ensuring regular reviews of statistical classifications.

**Recommendation 4:** Existing local data should be better used to improve the quality and range of statistics on crime. This could be achieved through police forces agreeing to publish, in a co-ordinated way, standardised comparable analyses at a local level. These analyses need not necessarily be drawn together and published as official statistics by the Home Office but must be consistent with those that are.

**Recommendation 5:** Comparability of crime statistics between the various countries within the UK should be improved, identifying and addressing areas of statistics where there are problems.

**Recommendation 6:** Technical research should be carried out (to a published timetable) to develop a set of weighted index measures of 'total crime' and promote debate on which, if any, of these measures should be adopted alongside the current basic count.

## SECTION 2: BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

7. In August 2005, the Statistics Commission initiated a review of official statistics on crime and appointed Matrix Research and Consultancy to lead the research.

### The Interim Report

8. The Commission published an Interim Report<sup>2</sup> in December 2005 which set out initial thinking on some of the issues:
  - On **public trust** in the figures, we expressed concern that the broad statistical messages about crime were being lost against a backdrop of confused reporting.
  - On the **measurement of fear of crime**, we observed that survey-based fear of crime measurements had become increasingly influential in public debate and were now central to some aspects of policy and performance management. Given this increased importance, there were questions over the adequacy of the available data.
  - We identified demand for a better **measure of 'total crime'**, but noted that such measures are problematic. They involve either adding, or weighting, together offences that are very different both in terms of their seriousness and in the extent to which they are reported to the police.
  - On **inter-administration comparisons**, we concluded that comparisons of crime trends between England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were potentially valuable, in that they might indicate the relative impact of different policing strategies and policies. Although making valid comparisons was sometimes technically challenging, investment to further develop them was justified.
  - In relation to **getting the best from local area crime data** we questioned whether the relatively rich data available locally within police forces were being made available and used to best advantage by local communities and researchers. We suggested that there was greater scope for use to be made of available information at the local level.

### The Consultancy Review

9. The Commission and Matrix Research and Consultancy co-hosted an expert seminar in October 2005 with a view to identifying and discussing key issues for the review. A report of the seminar is available<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit*

<sup>3</sup> Expert Seminar on UK Crime Statistics. Matrix Research and Consultancy, January 2006

10. Research was conducted in two stages. The first identified broad themes and the second examined some of these themes in more detail. The centrepiece of the first stage, which drew on the expert seminar, was a 'Delphi Study'<sup>4</sup>. This is a structured process which uses a three phase questionnaire that was completed by a range of individuals who produce and/or use crime statistics in various capacities.
11. The second stage comprised studies of:
  - The presentation of national crime statistics;
  - The relationship between statistical indicators and public reassurance and confidence;
  - The possible use of additional sources of data about crime;
  - The public use (including trust and understanding) of crime statistics through the mass media.
12. The findings of the Consultancy Review focused on who uses crime statistics, what they were used for and whether they were adequate for those purposes. The main findings were:
  - Statistics on crime are used by many different organisations and individuals for a variety of purposes. Typical users identified included central government; organisations responsible for local delivery of the criminal justice system – in particular the police and local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships; and the general public – especially older people, previous victims of crime and parents. Other groups of users included the research community, private sector organisations and the media (Part 2, Section 5).
  - The Review identified three main *uses* of crime statistics in government and local delivery organisations:
    - to develop policy on criminal justice and crime reduction programmes;
    - to manage performance at the national and the local level;
    - to communicate information about crime to the public.

<sup>4</sup> The Delphi method is a structured process for collecting and distilling knowledge from a group by using a series of questionnaires interspersed with opinion feedback. More detail on methods including each stage response rates can be found in Part 2, Appendix 1.

- It also outlined a range of *uses* by members of the public, including:
    - knowledge about other people’s experience of and perceptions about crime and disorder, with a focus on the local community;
    - assessing risk in their everyday lives and in the local community;
    - understanding the rationale for national and local government policy;
    - holding local delivery organisations to account.
  - The *adequacy* of crime statistics was considered against the uses above. The main conclusion was that crime statistics are broadly fit for policy making purposes (Part 2, Section 7.1). Even though police recorded crime statistics were considered an imperfect measure of crime, the existence of the British Crime Survey (and other surveys) – together with the scope for policy makers to commission additional research and draw on expert advice to support decision-making – indicated that the available crime statistics were broadly adequate in this context.
  - Adequacy was however seen as more variable in relation to managing national and local performance. The statistics were judged to be more suited to the performance management needs of central government than those of local delivery organisations and this was a weakness of some consequence.
  - In terms of the different purposes for which the public might use crime statistics, the Review concluded that the statistics are not entirely adequate (Part 2, Section 7.2). The reasons for this included the limitations of crime statistics (for example, lack of sufficiently local statistics), the lack of public trust in crime statistics (although this was recognised as being part of a wider problem) and the public’s ability to interpret statistics generally (in the crime field, neither the survey data nor the police recorded crime data are well understood by the public). Moreover, the public’s ability to interpret the statistics is likely to be negatively affected by the tendency of the media to focus on individual, often atypical, crimes rather than painting a ‘broad picture’. This was seen as adding to confusion and fear.
13. The Consultancy Review also examined each of the issues raised in the Interim Report and confirmed a lack of **public trust in crime statistics**. However, it found that the public were more concerned about the way in which the data were presented than their intrinsic quality. In addition, whilst the public were aware of crime statistics, or at least messages based on them, they were more influenced by the perceptions of friends and family. When there was a disparity between these two sources of information, people were likely to rely on the anecdotal; and lose trust in the official figures (Part 2, section 7.2.3).

14. Trust was not helped by some of the language/definitions used in presenting the statistics. For example, bigamy, possession of offensive weapons, illegal abortion and death by dangerous driving are all classified as 'violent crime'. This does not necessarily accord with the public's understanding of what is meant by 'violence'.
15. On the **measurement of fear of crime**, the Review noted that there had been debate in recent years about whether the British Crime Survey questions were as effective as possible (Part 2, Section 7.1.1). The Home Office has responded to this debate by developing the questions in recent surveys. However, it remains the case that the BCS does not provide information at a sufficiently local level to allow comparisons of fear of crime within and between local areas. Whilst we continue to have some concerns about the adequacy of fear of crime data, we have not made a specific recommendation in this report.
16. The Review was generally sceptical about alternative **measures of 'total crime'**. It considered two possible measures – a weighted index, where the weights reflect the seriousness of a crime, and an economic model based on the costs of crime (Part 2, Section 8.5). In the longer term it might be possible to develop a robust measure based on cost of crime, although no universally supported measure was identified.
17. In respect of **inter-administration comparisons**, the Review saw harmonisation of crime statistics within the UK as both politically desirable and technically feasible. However making valid comparisons was found to be difficult. This was due to differences in legal systems which resulted in crimes being defined differently and different survey methods and crime recording practices (Part 2, Appendix 6).
18. On **local information**, the Review concluded that the available crime statistics better meet the needs of central government than of local delivery organisations. Statistics derived from the BCS were robust at the national level but not at the local level. As a consequence, local delivery organisations necessarily rely on police recorded crime data, which are available for relatively small areas but not always suitable for local purposes. Local data were also the main focus of interest from the public. There was a strong consensus amongst those consulted that a standard set of analyses about local crime would be the best way to address local needs for crime statistics (Part 2, Section 8.4).
19. The Consultancy Review's recommendations can be found in full in Part 2, Section 9.

## SECTION 3: RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

20. The Statistics Commission starts from the premise that there is *public value* in a very wide range of the uses to which government, police, other bodies and the public wish to put crime statistics or messages drawn from those statistics. That is to say that society benefits from the statistics being effectively used and Government should aim to secure as much public value as possible from the statistical data.
21. It follows that, in order to secure full value, those responsible for the collection and presentation of statistics must aim to support the users as much as possible – guiding them through what is a potentially confusing field, pointing them to sources and to pitfalls in interpretation. And they should do so in a way that commands the trust of users.
22. In our Interim Report we questioned whether the existing statistics provided an adequate basis to support decision-making, inside and outside government, and so deliver the potential public value. In the light of the Consultancy Review we are content that statistics available are broadly fit for policy making purposes in government and to support central government's own performance management (in respect of Public Service Agreement targets for example), although we noted the absence of regular survey-derived data for crimes against business, in contrast to crimes against people.
23. However the Consultancy Review suggested that existing crime statistics were less adequate for the performance management of local delivery organisations – for example, the police and local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. We believe a key requirement for addressing these needs is better, more consistent, local area data.
24. The Review also found that crime statistics were often not able to support the various purposes for which the **public** want them. There were a number of reasons for this, including lack of trust in the statistics (which limits their practical value) and a lack of readily available local crime figures.

### Restoring public trust in crime statistics

25. Our first conclusion relates to the need to take action to promote trust in statistics. We believe that restoring public trust requires greater **structural separation of responsibility for the compilation and publication of statistics from the parts of government responsible for policy**, and widespread publicity of these new arrangements.

26. It is widely recognised that trust in official statistics is currently low and that this must be addressed in the interests of obtaining full value from the available information. Crime statistics present some special problems in this regard. There are two main sources, offences recorded by the police and results from the British Crime Survey, and both have well-documented shortcomings. The Government is looking to address the general problem of public trust through the introduction of legislation designed to ensure independent governance of official statistics<sup>5</sup>. In January 2006, with a view to addressing trust in crime statistics more specifically, the then Home Secretary appointed a cross-party group to review how crime statistics were compiled and published<sup>6</sup>. That group is expected to report in September 2006 and the Statistics Commission has kept it informed of progress with the research underlying this report.
27. Crime statistics for England and Wales are currently produced and disseminated by the Home Office. Whilst there are internal arrangements for ensuring statistical practices and procedures are followed, the impression that journalists and external commentators often gain is that the figures emerge from the same policy machine, and Ministerial press offices, as statements on policy and official responses to the statistics. We do not believe trust can be built up whilst the same Ministers, advisers and senior officials are directly involved both in publishing the figures and in setting out the Government's position.
28. We want to see commitment to a substantive move towards visible separation of the statistical and policy functions. We are not however making detailed proposals of our own at this stage. Options might include creating a separate organisational structure within the Home Office but with distinct oversight arrangements, much as has been achieved by the Department of Health in establishing the Information Centre for Health and Social Care. But there may be other models that would also achieve the goal of visible separation and so strengthen accountability within the wider statistical framework in government. Current plans for statistical legislation may open up further possibilities. So our first recommendation is:

**Recommendation 1: Responsibility for the compilation and publication of crime statistics should be located at arm's length from Home Office policy functions and with clear accountability within the evolving framework of the government statistical service.**

<sup>5</sup> *Independence for Statistics: A Consultation Document*, March 2006, HMSO.

<sup>6</sup> The review of crime data in England and Wales is being undertaken by an independent group of opposition party nominees, leading statisticians and media representatives. It was set up in response to a lack of understanding by the public about the levels and types of crime; the review team have been tasked with making recommendations to the Home Secretary on how to provide a measure of crime which is transparent, understood and trusted.

## British Crime Survey

29. The BCS is a large sample survey which collects information from individual members of the public on their experience as victims of crime and related questions. The Consultancy Review discussed some methodological issues affecting the survey and suggested it is time for a thorough methodological review. It also recommended reviewing the institutional arrangements at the same time.
30. The Statistics Commission shares these views and believes there is a case for moving responsibility for the BCS from the Home Office to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The ONS, with its strong focus on survey methodology, might also be best placed to undertake a methodological review. Under current government proposals, the ONS is expected to become a more independent 'non-ministerial department' with a largely non-executive board. The transfer of responsibility for the BCS could serve both to underline the enhanced authority of ONS over statistical survey matters within government, and build confidence in the BCS as a valid and valuable survey – which we do believe it to be.
31. However, although we see the case for transferring responsibility as strong, the Commission does not have available to it all the relevant information on costs and capacity to make a firm recommendation.
32. In relation to the other main source of crime statistics – those recorded by the police – we do not see a viable case for moving responsibility for compilation to ONS. The recorded crime statistics are an output of Home Office administrative systems and we think that so long as Recommendation 1 is adopted, it is better to leave responsibility with the department that has the relevant administrative expertise.

**Recommendation 2: Treasury and Home Office Ministers should consider together a fully developed business case for moving responsibility for the British Crime Survey to the Office for National Statistics and should publish their agreed view with supporting arguments.**

## Better communications with users through clearer presentation

33. Another route to increasing public trust in crime statistics is to improve communication with users through clearer presentation of the figures and accompanying commentary when they are first published. This would also enhance the practical value of the statistics to users. The Consultancy Review made a number of recommendations about the presentation of police recorded crime statistics, which we commend for serious consideration (see page 95).

34. In our Interim Report, we noted the negative effect on public trust that can arise from the use of technical terms that do not accord with public understanding of the words, and gave the specific example of the definition of violent crime used in the recorded crime data. The classification of any statistics can have a direct impact on their interpretation and confidence in the message. The Consultancy Review also picked up this point, and recommended that the presentation of violent crime statistics should be addressed, with a view to making a clear distinction between crimes that involve violence – in the commonly accepted sense of the term – and other incidents presently recorded under this category. The question of the appropriate classification of violent crime also emerged in a review of Penalty Notices for Disorder carried out by the Office for Criminal Justice Reform and the Home Office.<sup>7</sup>
35. We observe that most statistical classifications are reviewed from time to time. The National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) was introduced in 2002 (in some forces earlier) and we think it may now be helpful to review its impact on the clarity of messages from the statistics.
36. The Consultancy Review noted the improvement in the quality of recorded crime statistics that followed the introduction of the NCRS. This improvement has also been highlighted by a recent Audit Commission report on crime recording by police forces in England and Wales. It indicated that the NCRS has had a positive impact on the quality of crime recording and that there has been significant improvement both in data quality and in arrangements to support effective crime recording practices. However it also suggested that there was room for further improvement<sup>8</sup>.
37. Whilst recognising this progress we still think that the fundamental limitations and volatility of all recorded crime statistics should be made clearer. Equally, it is important to recognise that police recorded crime figures do measure some categories of crime better than the BCS. These include more serious violence and other uncommon offences and offences such as drug crime where the concepts of offender and victim are less clear-cut.
38. The Consultancy Review suggested that the police recorded crime statistics should be published separately from the results of the BCS, rather than in a joint release as at present. However, the Commission is persuaded by Home Office arguments in favour of joint release of recorded crime and BCS results. But we would like to see greater distinction made between BCS and the recorded crime data in the annual crime statistics publication and elsewhere, and greater clarity in explaining seemingly different messages from the two

<sup>7</sup> *Penalty Notices for Disorder. Review of Practices across selected police forces.* Charles Kraina and Liam Carroll. Office for Criminal Justice Reform. June 2006

<sup>8</sup> *Crime Recording 2005. Improving the quality of crime records in police authorities and forces in England and Wales.* Community Safety. National Report June 2006. Audit Commission

data sources. This will be achieved in part by being more forthcoming about the appropriate uses of statistics from each source and the limitations of the data in relation to those uses. This should be done as a matter of routine.

**Recommendation 3: The Home Office, and others as appropriate, should make changes to the presentation of the recorded crime figures in order to communicate better the main messages. These steps include:**

- **changing the definition of violent crime;**
- **greater distinction between British Crime Survey results and police recorded crime data and the uses for which each source is appropriate;**
- **ensuring regular reviews of statistical classifications.**

### **Meeting the demand for local area data**

39. We believe there is demand from many organisations and members of the public for local area data on crime. This view is supported by a recent Audit Commission report *Neighbourhood Crime and Anti-social Behaviour: Making Places Safer through Improved Local Working*<sup>9</sup>. That report suggested that, despite recent advances by the police and councils, most data on low level crime and anti-social behaviour was too 'broad brush' and that high quality information was needed for smaller areas.
40. We have concluded on the basis of the research available that there is **substantial demand from local delivery organisations and the public for more and better local level information on crime**; and this could largely be met through a more co-ordinated and systematic exploitation of available data sources (whilst acknowledging their limitations).
41. In our Interim Report, we asked whether the best use is currently being made of all the raw data available from local police records of reported crimes and other incidents. A lot of information about crimes, incidents, victims, offenders and problem locations is already held by local agencies. It is suggested in the Audit Commission report that the collation and dissemination of this information might be made the responsibility of local partnership bodies who could in turn create detailed profiles of crime and anti-social behaviour in their local neighbourhoods. That report also makes a number of recommendations relating to the collection and use of local level data including the collection of community intelligence provided by front line workers<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> *Neighbourhood Crime and Anti-social Behaviour. Making places safer through improved local working. Community safety. National Report. Audit Commission May 2006*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

42. There was a strong consensus among those consulted in the Review that ensuring that police forces offer (directly to the public) a standard set of quality assured analyses about local crime would be the best way to address local needs for these statistics. We do acknowledge that there has already been some progress in this direction. Examples include the local area crime statistics produced by the Metropolitan Police<sup>11</sup>. Their website provides comparable statistics for nine offence groups at ward level. Comparisons can be made from ward to borough level and data are available to download for further analysis. A wider range of crimes is listed in tables providing information by borough on a monthly basis. Other examples include the Home Office's Crime Statistics website<sup>12</sup> which presents data at Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership level for nine common offence groups. The Neighbourhood Statistics website<sup>13</sup> has data available for 'super output area middle layer areas' but currently it contains data for only some police forces.
43. Despite these helpful developments, there appears to be little co-ordination in the provision of this information. The Commission considers there is real public benefit to be gained from a more coherent approach. There is a strong case for having a standard set of comparable analyses which would be published by all forces, as well as for some supplementary analyses where local needs indicate they would be of value.

**Recommendation 4: Existing local data should be better used to improve the quality and range of statistics on crime. This could be achieved through police forces agreeing to publish, in a co-ordinated way, standardised comparable analyses at a local level. These analyses need not necessarily be drawn together and published as official statistics by the Home Office but must be consistent with those that are.**

### **Priorities for technical research – inter-administration comparisons and 'total crime'**

44. The Commission's final recommendations are for technical research into two key areas where we believe the available statistics and analyses are in some respects unsatisfactory. These are inter-administration comparisons (England and Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland) and measures of 'total crime'.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.met.police.uk/crimestatistics/index.htm>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.crimestatistics.org.uk/output/page1.asp>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination>

45. The Commission believes that the capacity to make comparisons of key statistics for the countries of the UK is important. Such comparisons have the potential to inform all the administrations, and other interested parties, about the relative need for public services and the effectiveness of different crime reduction strategies. However, research carried out for the Review demonstrated that making comparisons is currently difficult. Differences in legal systems, in definitions of crime, in recording practices, in crime survey management and in presentation of the data mean that the process of making valid comparisons is challenging.
46. Where such problems exist, we believe that action is needed to make comparisons easier. This may involve investment, specifically aimed at developing the comparability of key statistics across the countries of the UK. The Commission itself is not well placed to recommend specific technical solutions and we think that research on this is best undertaken under the supervision of the Home Office's own experts, working together with their counterparts in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

**Recommendation 5: Comparability of crime statistics between the various countries within the UK should be improved, identifying and addressing areas of statistics where there are problems.**

47. In our Interim Report, we observed that whether 'crime' is going up or down has been a major issue in political debate for at least two centuries. So it is perhaps inevitable that many users of statistics demand a count of 'total crime'. This concept is however less robust than it might appear. Not all types of offences are included in the recorded crime statistics and there is no particularly convincing reason for counting every offence as 'one', whether it is a murder or minor theft. Some common offences, such as shoplifting, are known to be incompletely reported to the police and it is therefore quite possible for trends in 'total crime' to be strongly influenced by changes in reporting and recording. Such arguments have led to calls for a weighted index of crime that gives more weight to more serious offences. But it has yet to be demonstrated that this can be done in a way that commands public confidence.
48. The Consultancy Review commented that "total crime is an oxymoron". It nevertheless recommended that consideration be given to the long-term development of different measures. The particular measures favoured by the Review were weighted indices where the weights are based on the cost of crime and/or quantification of the consequences and harms from crime.

49. In the absence of any alternative, public focus on crime tends to be on simple aggregates which we think are worse than weighted measures. We recommend that the Home Office should commission or undertake further research of a number of weighted indices, with weights derived in different ways, including basing weight on the penalties imposed by the courts for different types of offence, on estimates of the cost to society of each type of crime and quantified measures of crime-related consequences. We think it important that a timetable be announced for this research, in order to provide momentum.
50. The objective of the research should be to offer, for public debate, options for at least one publishable measure of total crime that is objective and technically robust, and which also commands public support. If an index is to be adopted, it is important that there should be wide consensus about the appropriateness of the approach used. Our final recommendation is:

**Recommendation 6: Technical research should be carried out (to a published timetable) to develop a set of weighted index measures of total crime and promote debate on which, if any, of these measures should be adopted alongside the current basic count.**

## **Crime Statistics in Scotland and Northern Ireland**

51. The recommendations in this report are for the most part directed at the Home Office, which is responsible for compiling and publishing crime statistics for England and Wales. In Scotland, policy responsibility for crime is devolved and statistics are compiled and published by the Scottish Executive. Crime statistics for Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Office.
52. We think it likely that the issues addressed in this report, and in the Consultancy Review are also relevant to crime statistics in Scotland and Northern Ireland. There will, of course, be some differences. For example, the British Crime Survey, despite its title, only covers England and Wales – Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own surveys which follow different models.
53. Nevertheless it seems likely that the similarities in crime recording between the administrations will be greater than the differences. To the extent that this is the case, many of our recommendations may also be relevant to those administrations. So the Commission would invite the Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Office to consider the recommendations – and the Home Office's response to them – and seek to co-ordinate their own statistical developments in a way that is harmonious with those in England and Wales.

# **Review of Crime Statistics**

## **PART 2**

**Report to the Statistics Commission  
by Matrix and Professor Tim Hope**

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# 1 Executive Summary

## 1.1 Aims of the Review

The Review considered official crime-related statistics (excluding statistics on the criminal justice system) as well as other crime-related statistics that are or potentially could be brought within the public domain. The Review focused upon the *use* of crime statistics and their *fitness for purpose*. This involved consideration of: the adequacy and coverage of crime statistics (in each of the jurisdictions of the United Kingdom), their use in decision making, and in particular, the needs of the users. Methodological issues concerning the statistics were considered only where appropriate to a consideration of their use.

As the Review has developed we have focused on four key questions:

- What groups and organisations have an interest in crime statistics?
- What purposes do these organisations wish to use crime statistics to fulfil?
- Are the available crime statistics fit for these purposes?
- What other crime statistics might be available and would they be fit for these purposes?

Throughout the Review we have paid particular attention to the needs of ‘the public’.

## 1.2 Groups with an interest in crime statistics

A variety of groups have an interest in crime statistics. The primary ‘users’ of crime statistics are:

- The public;
- Central government – in particular the Home Office, Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Office; and
- Organisations responsible at a local level for the delivery of the criminal justice system and crime reduction – in particular the police and other partners within local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs).

However, other groups also have an interest. These include the research community (both academic and commercial), private sector organisations who make use of crime statistics to sell services, or for business information purposes, and the media. These groups provide services, of one kind or another, to the primary users, based upon crime statistics.

## 1.3 Fitness for Purpose of crime statistics

### Government and the public sector

National government and local delivery organisations have three main purposes for their use of crime statistics:

- making policy;
- managing performance; and
- communicating with the public.

### Making policy

Allowing for the fact that policy makers can commission bespoke research and ex ante evaluation to support policy making decisions, the available crime statistics are broadly fit for policy making purposes.

Key issues relating to specific types of crime statistics are highlighted below.

### Police recorded crime statistics

It has long been recognised that police recorded crime statistics are an imperfect measure of crime and hence not an adequate basis for policy. They are highly dependent on:

- recording practices and counting rules,
- the relevant authorities' (limited) ability to detect the occurrence of crime, and
- the public's (including victim's) varying propensities to report crime occurrences to the authorities.

Variations in these factors, between places and over time, greatly reduce the reliability of crime statistics as: measures of the need for crime control policy; or measures of performance in delivering it.

The data that have been available hitherto has been provided by local police forces in summary form, according to agreed counting rules. The data set contains limited case and contextual information that would be of interest to policy makers, for e.g. details of offences and the demographics of victims.

Future plans for the direct supply of crime records to the Home Office (through the NMIS system) may go some way to change this position, providing a more flexible, standardised and detailed crime record information system.

### **Other statistics**

It was partly because of the recognised limitations of recorded crime statistics in supporting policy making – especially in failing to capture the extent of un-reported crime victimisation – that the British Crime Survey (BCS) was originally introduced in 1981. The introduction of other surveys such as the Offending, Crime and Justice Survey, Commercial Victimisation Survey, Youth Lifestyles Survey and the Drug Arrestee Survey have provided further important data sets to support policy making, though none of these have either the coverage or the frequency to match the BCS.

### **Performance**

The capacity of the crime statistics to meet performance needs at central versus local level varies, with the statistics more appropriate to central government purposes than the needs of local organisations. However generally, crime statistics are not ‘fit for purpose’ as a means of managing performance.

The substantial investment that has gone into the various improvements in the official crime statistics in recent years would seem primarily determined by the needs of central government. Issues concerning the investment in crime statistics and statistical systems that might be needed to meet the increased expectations that have been placed on local agencies have not been addressed to the degree to which national government’s needs have been addressed.

Key issues relating to specific types of crime statistics are highlighted below.

### **Police recorded crime statistics**

Home Office policy-makers and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) use crime statistics to assess the performance of local criminal justice agencies, including police forces and, more recently, the CDRPs. Performance assessment has become much more systematised in recent years, for example, with the introduction of the Police Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF). Historically, recorded crime statistics have been used in national-level performance measurement, and are now available publicly for Police Forces Areas (PFA), Basic Command Units (BCUs) and CDRPs.

The National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) was introduced in 2001 primarily to bring about a standardisation in crime recording practice across the country, itself necessary to facilitate a consistent standard of comparison between PFAs over time.

There seems to be widespread agreement that the NCRS has now put in place the best standard of crime recording obtained to date. This has been due to its recording procedures, its administrative system (through the police force Crime Registrars network), and the programme of auditing of compliance carried out by the Audit Commission on behalf of the Home Office.

Although compliance was at first incomplete, the programme of auditing has now substantially improved levels of compliance nationally. The NCRS has also had the effect of instituting a 'methodology' so that difficulties, anomalies and problems in definition/recording can be tackled systematically by the relevant parties. In sum, the NCRS seems to have put in place a system that will maintain the future integrity of the recorded crime series.

Despite improvements brought about by the NCRS, the extent to which recorded crime statistics are dependent on counting rules and the collection process will remain a serious limitation to their use. The strongest examples of this abiding problem are violent crime and anti-social behaviour. Despite the priority afforded to these offences in government policy, they are the ones that pose the greatest problems of definition, recording, and the greatest volatility in public reporting.

Local criminal justice agencies, especially police BCUs and CDRPs have been required both to assess their performance, and to base their operational and strategic decision-making, upon the use of crime statistics. Unlike national government, local government requirements have had to be met by recorded crime statistics alone, since the cost to the Exchequer of mounting local surveys equivalent to the BCS would be prohibitive. Nevertheless, since crime records are captured at the local level there exists some limited capacity for greater granularity and flexibility in output coverage to lower aggregations of local government and police geography (this will also be available to central government following implementation of NMIS).

### **British Crime Survey**

Both BCS and recorded crime data are used by the Home Office to report on its performance under the relevant Public Service Agreements (PSA1 and PSA2) required by HM Treasury. However, the importance of the PSA framework, along with the deficiencies of recorded crime data (see above), now means that the BCS has become the primary source of crime statistics for Home Office performance management at national and Government Office (England and Wales) level. It is also now accepted that performance targets for Anti-Social Behaviour will be measured chiefly through perceptual information; again, only to be gleaned from survey data.

Despite the importance now attached to the BCS as the primary national source of important data on crime, and a significant increase in its sample size to provide more frequent measurement at police force area (PFA) level, its basic methodology has remained substantially unchanged since its inception 25 years ago.

Not only has its cost increased substantially (currently about £4 million in fieldwork and data preparation costs alone) but like all social surveys, the BCS encounters a range of methodological issues that can affect its reliability and validity substantially. Neither the range of problems, nor the methodological solutions arrived at (including the re-design applied in 2001) have been sufficiently transparent to either afford independent or public scrutiny. Although work was commissioned by the Home

Office around sampling methodology, it is not clear whether the Home Office have taken full advantage of the methodological expertise available in the wider expert community, or whether necessary steps have been taken to ensure that public interests in the reliability of the BCS and value-for-money issues are properly balanced.

Since its redesign in 2001, particularly due to an increased sample size, the BCS can now be used to compute crime statistics and related information at PFA level. Nevertheless, the BCS lacks the *granularity* to provide reliable statistics on areas of a scale lower than PFA.

## Communication

National government and local crime reduction and criminal justice delivery organisations wish to communicate with the public. However, because it is not clear what it is that Government want to communicate to the public it is difficult to assess whether the crime data that are available to government and local delivery organisations is fit for purpose.

Currently, the Home Office publishes regular statistical bulletins that include both findings from the BCS and recorded crime statistics that focus on national crime trends. This potentially leads to confusion for public regarding key messages.

## The public

It is harder to define the purposes for which the public would wish to use crime statistics, but these include:

- having knowledge about other people's experience of and perceptions of crime and disorder in their everyday lives, generally with a focus on their local community;
- their ability to assess risk within their everyday lives and their local communities;
- their interest in understanding the rationale for national and local government policy; and
- their interest in holding local crime reduction and criminal justice delivery organisations to account.

Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that the general public has any clearly articulated view as to how crime statistics could assist in these purposes. Not surprisingly, the absence of clarity about the public's interests in crime statistics is shared by professionals in both government and local crime reduction and criminal justice delivery organisations. The public rely upon others (including central and local government) to assist them with defining their needs and to interpreting how the crime statistics might help them. In general, this requires:

- government/producers to release crime statistics appropriately;
- media to report/communicate the statistics accurately; and
- government/academics/commentators/interest groups to provide valid interpretations of the statistics and to demonstrate the applicability of statistics to meeting the public's needs.

If we consider the different purposes that the public have for crime then they are generally not fit for purpose. Key reasons underpinning this conclusion are:

- **Limitations with the crime statistics themselves.** For instance, the lack of neighbourhood level statistics and the extent to which statistics reflect public perceptions of crimes such as violence.
- **The role of the media as a mediator between crime statistics as published and their consumption by the public.** It was recognised that the media pursue a range of agendas and interests and tend to focus on stories about individual, atypical crimes rather than statistics. Although journalists who specialise in Home Affairs do sometimes have a good understanding of the crime statistics, the wider media sometimes distorts statistical information it reports due to a lack of understanding.
- **The lack of public trust in crime statistics.** This lack of trust is not specific to crime statistics.
- **The public's ability to interpret crime statistics.** Neither survey data nor police-recorded crime are well understood by the public. In particular the relationship between the BCS and recorded crime statistics causes confusion.

## 1.4 Potential solutions

During the Review a number of issues and challenges have been identified. These have included:

- the possibility of using alternative data to provide additional insight into 'hidden' crime
- regulating statistics;
- focusing on standard analysis at a local level; and
- developing global measures of crime.

## 1.5 Findings and recommendations

The ongoing development of crime statistics is hampered by a confusion of means

(technical discussions about crime statistics that focus on their interpretation and reliability) and ends (conceptual discussions about the purposes and interests of different groups in using crime statistics). These are considered separately below.

## Purposes

Our findings apply both to national government and local crime reduction and criminal justice delivery organisations:

The Home Office should introduce more clarity between policy, performance and communication as different and distinct purposes when it uses crime statistics internally and presents the outputs of this work publicly. This is achievable in the short-term.

When presenting crime statistics publicly, as a performance measure, the Home Office should make a clearer distinction between the limitations of the crime statistics and the limitations of the performance management systems. This is achievable in the short-term.

## Means

### Recorded crime statistics

The introduction of NCRS is an important step. Our recommendations focus on the way in which recorded crime statistics are used and presented:

The Home Office should address the use and presentation of violent crime statistics so that the definition of violent crime makes a clear distinction between crimes that involve violence in the commonly accepted use of the term and other incidents that are currently grouped as violence. This is achievable in the medium-term.

The Home Office should provide additional support to the public to help the public better understand the improvements to recorded crime statistics brought about by the introduction of the NCRS, but at the same time, make clear the fundamental limitations and volatility of all recorded crime statistics, based as they are on legal definitions and counting rules that change over time. This is a task that will also need to involve local crime reduction and criminal agencies, following the Home Office lead. This is achievable in the short to medium-term.

The Home Office should present the recorded crime statistics separately from the BCS as a measure of criminal justice performance, particularly with respect to the more serious and better reported crimes, and workload rather than as an overall measure of crime.

## **BCS**

All surveys are subject to certain methodological constraints which are a product of issues such as sampling strategies, interview techniques, data definition and coding, data management and analytical processes.

The BCS incorporates many such decisions that affect the reliability of the estimates to be derived from it, but it is very hard for experts let alone the general public to satisfy themselves about the survey's reliability.

As the BCS is now so important, more policy weight and scrutiny in relation to performance measurement is being attached to it. In addition the methodological considerations above also have value-for-money implications (e.g. sample sizes, and sampling designs). It is therefore crucial that the reliability of BCS is subject to public scrutiny.

The Home Office should publish its ongoing programme of work to ensure that the BCS is as robust as possible. This should include a planned programme of work and the results of such work. This can be commenced in the short-term.

The publicly perceived and understood distinction between policy customers and research providers of the BCS is important to the perceived and actual independence of the BCS. Policy customers and research providers within the Home Office need to have a close and ongoing dialogue but, nevertheless, their roles need to be clearly defined and separated to ensure that the BCS is neither put, nor seen to be put under undue pressure. There are a number of organisational arrangements that might facilitate this distinction ranging from a prominent independent steering group to oversee the methodological development of the BCS to placing the BCS outside the Home Office.

The Home Office should consider organisational arrangements that might strengthen the distinction between policy customers and research providers. These might range from a prominent independent steering group to oversee the methodological development of the BCS to placing the BCS outside the Home Office. This is achievable in the medium to long-term.

## **Global measure of crime**

In view of the likely difficulties arising from the collection and standardisation issues involved, the answer to meeting the need for a 'total' measure or index of crime does not appear to be best met by searching for additional and alternative measure of crime, particularly those that might rely on data collected by non-governmental agencies and organisations. The Home Office has conducted some work on estimating the costs of crime and the fragility of such estimate. Work should continue

on analytic models for the construction of indices to be compiled from existing public statistics and data sources.

The Home Office should consider further the long-term development of weighted indices of crime, including a 'cost of crime' measure potentially using Quality of Life Indicators (for instance, the QALY<sup>1</sup>). This is achievable in the long-term.

### Methodology

The review comprised two key stages; (1) a "shallow and wide stage" involving a large number of individuals to help identify broad themes and issues, and (2) a "narrow and deep" phase which comprised four case studies and examined some of the key issues from stage 1 in more depth.

The Shallow and Wide stage included an expert seminar – which involved key experts in crime and discussed some of the more prevalent issues relating to crime statistics – and a Delphi study. The Delphi study comprised a three stage questionnaire which was completed by a diverse range of individuals who produce and/or use crime statistics in various different capacities.

The Narrow and Deep stage of the review involved four case studies which focused on:

- The presentation of National Crime Statistics;
- The relationship between statistical indicators and public reassurance and confidence
- Additional sources for measuring total crime?: the financial sector; and
- The public use (including trust and understanding) of crime statistics through the mass media.

<sup>1</sup> QALYs (Quality Adjusted Life Years) are measures of quality of life. They take account of the duration of a life and the quality of each year in that life, as measured by preference weights



# 2 Introduction

In August 2005, the Statistics Commission initiated a review of official statistics relating to crime and criminal justice in the four countries of the UK and appointed Matrix Research and Consultancy in partnership with Professor Tim Hope (Keele University) to undertake the research.

As directed by the Commission, the review has considered:

- the needs of users – the general public and specialist users;
- the adequacy of the data in meeting users' needs;
- the use of data in decision making; and
- the adequacy of these statistics in terms of: methodology, presentation, dissemination and interpretation.

The scope has included statistics on: crime, criminal justice, offender management where these are relevant to understanding patterns and trends in crime data, and some non-official statistics that may be relevant to the measurement of crime levels. The scope excludes statistics relating to the administration of family and civil justice, the judiciary, legal aid, the legal professions and the legal services market.



# 3 Approach

A summary of the review is set out below. A more detailed description can be found in Appendix 1. This review has been split into two phases, 'Shallow and Wide' and 'Narrow and Deep'.

## 3.1 Shallow and Wide

The objectives set for this phase were to:

- establish the views of users, both within and outside of the main user community, regarding statistics on crime; and
- gather evidence on the use made of statistics and their fitness for purpose.

The Shallow and Wide phase comprised:

- an all-day seminar with invited experts in the field of crime-related statistics;
- a Delphi survey<sup>2</sup>;
- a review of the available literature in the field; and
- a compilation of the official sources of available statistics.

## 3.2 Narrow and Deep

The Narrow and Deep stage examined pertinent issues arising from the first stage of the review through four case study topics developed in consultation with the project board. These were:

- the presentation of National Crime Statistics<sup>3</sup>;
- the relationship between statistical indicators and Public Reassurance and Confidence<sup>4</sup>;
- additional sources for measuring total crime: the financial and commercial sector<sup>5</sup>; and
- the public use (including trust and understanding) of crime statistics through the mass media<sup>6</sup>.

Each of these case studies involved interviews and discussions with key individuals.

<sup>2</sup> Details of the organisations where individuals were invited to participate can be found in Appendix 8 of this report.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 2 for a the detailed report of this case study

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 3 for a the detailed report of this case study

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 4 for a the detailed report of this case study

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 5 for a the detailed report of this case study

### 3.3 Organisation of findings

As the review developed we focused on four key questions:

- What groups and organisations have an interest in crime statistics?
- What purposes do they have that they wish to use crime statistics to help fulfil?
- Are the available crime statistics fit for these purposes?
- What other crime statistics might be available and would they be fit for these purposes?

Throughout the review we paid particular attention to the needs of 'the public'.

# 4 Context

## 4.1 Existing national crime statistics

There are a number of different sources of crime data that have been considered within this review. These are detailed below.

### 4.1.1 Police-recorded crime

#### England and Wales

In England and Wales police-recorded crime is composed of categories of crime that are outlined in the Home Office Counting Rules<sup>7</sup> and known as ‘notifiable offences’. These include: violence against the person, sexual offences, robbery, burglary, theft, handling stolen goods, fraud and forgery, criminal damage, drug offences and ‘other offences’. The data are published on police force websites.

In the past, research has shown that police-recorded crime figures are subject to two kinds of limitations:

*People will not report all crime, because:*

- some are wary of reporting serious crimes such as sexual offences and domestic violence;
- the victim considers an offence to be too trivial, and/or the process of reporting a crime too inconvenient; or
- the victims do not trust the response of criminal justice agencies and fear the added trauma of pursuing the case in court.

*The police will not always record crime reported to them because:*

- there may be insufficient evidence that a crime has occurred;
- there is little chance of an offender being detected; and
- the police exercise discretion in recording incidents.

#### National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS)

Over time, there have been changes in the way that police have been asked to record crime such as amendments to the Counting Rules introduced in 1998 and the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in April 2002. The NCRS requires that the police record a crime if “*the circumstances as reported amount to a crime as defined by law and there is no credible evidence to the contrary*”<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/countrules.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/countrecstan05.pdf>

The record will remain unless evidence emerges to disprove that a crime has occurred. The NCRS was introduced to ensure standardisation of police recording practices between types of complainant, types of incident and within and between police services<sup>9</sup>.

Inevitably, the price to be paid for greater standardisation is a loss of temporal comparability, making the analysis of trends of limited value or even impossible. Even so, the NCRS may be bringing about improvements in comparability between police forces, which is necessary for the Police Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF). The goal of PPAF is to help manage the police service towards the attainment of targets set out in current Public Service Agreements (PSAs) in compliance with the National Policing Plan<sup>10</sup>. PPAF is managed by the Police Standards Unit within the Home Office. It consists of Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) and Key Diagnostic Indicators (KDIs).

It should be noted that the coverage of available crime statistics is limited by the omission of summary offences from the published recorded data (in England and Wales) and the omission of data from police forces such as the British Transport Police, although it has now been agreed that BTP crimes should be included in the national totals rather than reported separately.

### **Scotland**

Scotland police-recorded crime statistics are more highly aggregated than those in England and Wales. Instead of the NCRS Scotland has the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS). This is designed to reflect the legal systems, and the data published are not as detailed.

### **Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland adheres to the NCRS and follows similar principles to those in England and Wales.

## **4.1.2 Victimisation Surveys**

### **British Crime Survey (BCS)**

There are a number of victimisation surveys in the UK. The largest is the BCS, which actually covers only England and Wales. This survey asks approximately 45,000 adults in private households per year about levels of crime and public attitudes to crime.

<sup>9</sup> Home Office (2000). *Review of Crime Statistics: a discussion document*. London: Home Office.

<sup>10</sup> Home Office (2004). *National Policing Plan 2005-08*.

The survey asks about crime the individuals have experienced within the last year, including crimes *that were not reported* to the police. The BCS includes questions relating to attitudes to crime, such as the level of worry about crime, and also questions about measures taken to avoid crime.

The BCS has a range of uses. It provides:

- a measure of crime victimisation, independent of police-recorded crime statistics;
- a means of 'auditing' police-recorded crime statistics. For instance, divergence in relation to violent crime is of particular interest. Without the BCS it would not be possible to distinguish between trends in police figures generated by changes in crime as opposed to changes in police recording;
- data on people's perceptions of crime such as worry and fear; and
- data to help policy makers identify those groups most likely to be at risk of crime.

### **Scottish Crime and Victimization Survey (SCVS)**

The main aims of the SCVS are to:

- provide a complementary measure of crime to police-recorded crime statistics;
- examine trends in the extent and nature of crime over time;
- examine the risk of falling victim to crime; and
- collect information on a number of crime-related issues.

Scotland was incorporated in the first BCS, although this only covered southern and central Scotland. Since then, the SCVS has been independent of the BCS. There were survey sweeps in 1993, 1996, 2000 and 2003 involving 5,000 adults in face-to-face interviews. Following a review of the survey in 2003, the latest survey launched in June 2004 now involves continuous data collection, with a rolling monthly sample of adults across Scotland that, as with BCS, involves adults over 16. These interviews involve a total annual sample size of 27,500 and are carried out over the telephone, although recent work has indicated problems with telephone-based surveys. This enables estimates of victimisation at police-force-area level and allows more robust estimates of lower incidence crimes.

### **Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS)**

A victimisation survey is conducted in Northern Ireland following the principles of the BCS.

## **Commercial Victimization Survey (CVS)**

The CVS was run by the Home Office in 1994 and 2002 and is the main official source of information on crime against commercial targets. This survey involves crime against small- and medium-sized retail and manufacturing premises in England and Wales.

## **Other surveys**

Further surveys include the Offending Crime and Justice Survey (OCJS), which examines the extent of offending, anti-social behaviour and drug use among the household population, and in particular, among young people aged from 10 to 25. This survey covers offences against households, individuals and businesses. In addition to 'mainstream' offences such as burglary, shoplifting and assault, it also covers fraud and technology offences. Other surveys include international surveys such as the International Crime Victims Study (ICVS).

## **4.2 Key developments within crime statistics**

Historically, crime statistics have served two main purposes: as moral statistics on the nature and distribution of crime and criminals, indicative of the condition of society; and as statutory statistics, produced by the responsible authorities, to account for their dealings with crime. The Secretary of State for the Home Office is obligated to present to Parliament information about crime collected from the police. These crime statistics were published annually in a series of Criminal Statistics. Key developments that have occurred in the last 20 years include:

- social, political and administrative changes;
- introduction of the BCS;
- increased use of crime statistics;
- introduction of NCRS in 2002 (although in a few forces it was earlier); and
- redesign of the BCS.

### **Social, political and administrative changes**

Contemporary perspectives on crime statistics are evolving, shaped by changes in society and politics. Some of these are examined in the table below.

**Figure 1: Societal change and the impact on the use and availability of crime statistics**

Societal change	Impact on the use and availability of crime statistics
<i>The Data Explosion (Maguire)<sup>11</sup></i>	The information technology revolution has made it possible to collate and analyse information to an unprecedented scale and complexity, and such facilities are set to continue.
<i>The Information/Risk Society</i>	Information and data have become increasingly central to most people's lives throughout society; people now expect, and demand, more by way of information to assist them in their everyday decision-making.
<i>The Culture of Crime</i>	Crime and punishment have become far more salient in contemporary society and politics, and have become attached to other values and evaluations of policies and programmes. People are concerned about how crime will affect them in managing their everyday lives, and as an issue with which to evaluate government and public services, to unprecedented degrees.***
<i>Decline of moral orthodoxy</i>	Behaviours that are crimes are also practiced widely in the population (eg drug misuse). Deviance and 'criminality' are widespread, at least amongst the young (eg at least a third of the male population will have a criminal conviction by the age of thirty years). While most of the population support the statutory definitions, crime is also frequently practised in the breach.
<i>Decline of trust in authority</i>	The pronouncements of authority (including government statistics) are no longer taken on trust in the way they once were. The media has played a role here in the fostering of a more open but also a more sceptical society.
<i>Governance</i>	Contemporary forms of government are placing data and information in a far more central role in facilitating governance: particularly influential has been the adoption of market processes into the public sector and the 'new public management', including 'governing-at-a-distance', the separation of 'steering' and 'rowing' functions, consumer choice, local accountability, partnership working, etc.
<i>Modernisation of public services</i>	For at least the past 25 years, Government has pursued an agenda to modernise and reform public services, especially those delivered locally.
<i>Criminal justice reform</i>	Reflecting the above, there has been a greater emphasis on the reform of the criminal justice system (CJS), especially since the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review. Whereas the reform process in the health and education sectors has been lengthier and more developed, reform initiatives in the CJS have been more recent and, as yet, more limited. Nevertheless, the pace of change, particularly in policing (following the Police Reform Act 2002) is gaining considerable momentum

All of the above changes have had a major impact on the role and significance of crime statistics in society.

<sup>11</sup> Maguire, M. (2002) 'Crime statistics: the 'data explosion' and its implications' in M. Maguire et al. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology: 3rd Edition*. Oxford: OUP; Hope, T. (2005). 'What do crime statistics tell us?'. In C. Hale, K. Hayward, A. Wahidin and E. Wincup (Eds.). *Criminology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## **Introduction of the BCS**

As a result of the deficiencies associated with police data at national level the BCS<sup>12</sup> was introduced in 1981. Although such surveys can never measure adequately the totality of crime victimisation in society, the BCS is supported by various periodic national surveys to supplement its coverage (e.g. the Commercial Victimisation Survey). Surveys are thought to be more reliable with regard to measuring property crime, and directly-experienced victimisation.

## **Increased use of crime statistics**

In recent years, the BCS has been used increasingly by the Home Office as the principal statistical source for measuring crime patterns and trends at national level in England and Wales. A series of Home Office Statistical Bulletins which draw information from both Recorded Crime and BCS sources and the range of perceptual and attitudinal information contained in the BCS have been used to report on trends in a variety of measures. Both Recorded Crime and BCS statistics are now used routinely by the Home Office as part of the 'management tool-kit' applied to local services for which it has responsibility (the police, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships), and as a means by which the Home Office accounts publicly for its own performance, including to HM Treasury and Parliament.

## **NCRS introduced**

Major reforms of crime statistics were implemented after a major review of the Crime Statistics in 2000 to accommodate this need: the recorded crime statistics are now collected according to the NCRS whose purpose, in part, is to ensure comparability between local police services through the implementation of standard methods of recording crime.

## **Redesign of BCS**

The BCS was also redesigned to provide estimates for each Police Force Area (PFA) to assist in comparability, and to estimate perceptual/attitudinal indicators regarding fear of crime, public satisfaction and fear. Data are regularly used as part of the Police Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF). However, due to the substantial costs involved survey data are not collected below PFA-level (i.e. for BCUs/CDRPs, unitary or county authorities).

<sup>12</sup> The first British Crime Survey covered Great Britain. Since 1984, the BCS has covered England and Wales. Since 1992, the BCS was conducted biennially, and since 2000, annually on a continuous survey basis, with a greatly increased sample size. There have been periodic, though intermittent, national crime victimisation surveys in Scotland, and in Northern Ireland.

## 4.3 The debate within criminology

Three fundamental questions about the ‘accuracy’ of crime statistics have been considered by criminologists, and by varying degrees by policy makers and practitioners.

### Definition of crime

Criminology has been concerned with defining what constitutes *crime*. It is now a general orthodoxy that what constitutes crime cannot be separated from the State, its law, and statutory agencies of enforcement. Crime, in the sense of an ‘offence’ is an offence against the State, even if ‘third parties’ (victims, the community) are involved. Crime statistics are therefore always *official* by definition, although as discussed in section 8.1.1 on hidden crime, they do not necessarily give a true reflection of total crime.

Statutory definitions of crime define what is counted and how it is counted. However, the boundaries as to what is legally proscribed and enforced continue to shift. Existing statutory definitions become obsolete, and new forms of *harm* (or *wrong*) emerge, or increase in seriousness (eg ‘anti-social behaviour’), and become the object of statutory intervention. These are matters of moral and political preference, and reflect issues such as: the relative heinousness of particular crimes; and the extent of state supervision and regulation of civil society and private life.

### Representativeness

Criminology has also been concerned with the *representativeness* of official statistics on crime. Do they provide an accurate and unbiased measure of the occurrence of crime in society? For example is recorded crime a measure of the workload of the police rather than a barometer of society? The debate about *representativeness* has focussed on:

- *Feasibility* – Is it feasible to count the incidence of all acts and events that constitute crime (legally proscribed), and if not, what limits this?
- *Bias* – What ‘biases’ exist in the official statistics of crime, and do they reflect: the propensities of those affected to report crime to the authorities; or the operations and practices (including the crime recording practices) of the authorities that collect and collate them.
- *Alternative means of data collection* – the representativeness of alternative means of collecting data especially (self-reported) crime victimisation surveys.

## Reactions to crime

A third area of enquiry in Criminology lies in understanding the meaning and significance of crime in society. It is recognised that crime statistics do not sufficiently reflect the general mood about crime in the population i.e. they no longer serve the purpose of *moral statistics*.

Public perceptions of crime *risk* and crime *threat* (including the ‘fear-of-crime’) are shaped by a host of considerations, in addition to knowledge of the overall level of crime, in society generally, or in their own locality. This is discussed in more depth in Appendix 3 of this report.

There is a dissonance between public perceptions and evaluations of crime risk and their objective risk. This has different and variant causes, and it varies by type of crime, and type of person.

## 4.4 The policy debate

It is important to recognise that this Review does not take place ‘in a vacuum’. While the basic elements of the modern system of recording crime statistics stem from the review carried out by the Perks Committee in the 1960s<sup>13</sup>, the major changes to the official crime statistics noted in this report derive from a series of reviews carried out more recently:

### Reviews of recorded Crime

A thematic inspection by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary<sup>14</sup> and Home Office Research Study 204<sup>15</sup> both identified significant deficiencies in the quality of police-recorded crime data. These issues were also taken up in 2000 in the Simmons Report<sup>16</sup> which looked widely across the range of issues concerning both the production and presentation of crime statistics. These reports provided the rationale for the NCRS, implemented in April 2002 by the Association of Chief Police Officers. The Simmons Report also recommended the current Home Office approach to publishing crime statistics – joint publication of data from the BCS and police-recorded crime in an annual “Picture of Crime in England and Wales” supplemented by quarterly updates. Recorded Crime Statistics are now publicly available at Basic Command Unit (BCU)/Crime and Disorder Partnership (CDRP) level – usually the equivalent of local authority districts.

<sup>13</sup> Home Office (1967). *Report of the Departmental Committee on Crime Statistics*. (The Perks Committee). For an historic review of crime statistics, and a contemporary update, see Maguire (2002).

<sup>14</sup> HMIC (2000). *On the Record*, Thematic Inspection Report on Police Crime recording, the Police National Computer and Phoenix Intelligence System Data Quality. HM Inspector Keith Povey, July 2000

<sup>15</sup> Home Office Research Study 204 Review of police forces’ crime recording practices, John Burrows, Roger Tarling, Alan Mackie, Rachel Lewis and Geoff Taylor, 2000

<sup>16</sup> Home Office (2000). *Review of Crime Statistics: A Discussion Document*, (Simmons Report), July 2000.

## Reviews of the BCS

Since its introduction major reforms of the BCS have been instituted to accommodate a range of needs identified in this review, including the use of BCS data in police performance measurement, and in the assessment of the public's 'fear of crime' and satisfaction with the criminal justice system. The bases for the sampling methodology of the current BCS series were assessed prior to their implementation in 2001 in an unpublished report commissioned by the Home Office from the National Centre for Social Research<sup>17</sup>.

## Reviews of local Crime Statistics

As noted elsewhere in this study, the last few years have seen a major transformation in the use of, and expectations placed upon, crime statistics, particularly as a means for assessing the performance of local policing and crime reduction services. The series of Home Office National Policing Plans for England and Wales (introduced by the Police Reform Act, 2002) have brought about the development, inter alia, of the Police Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) which is now used by the Home Office Policing Standards Unit (PSU) to monitor the performance of police services in England and Wales. As part of this activity, the PSU have also commissioned the Audit Commission to carry out a series of audits of police force crime recording with a view to developing compliance with the NCRS.

A recent report from the Audit Commission draws attention to the substantial amount of central government funding for community safety now flowing to the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) set up by the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998, which also calls for a greater use of crime statistics in the assessment of local needs and the delivery of services<sup>18</sup>. This report covers a number of sources and techniques for extrapolating and linking crime data to neighbourhood level (i.e. below the level at which crime statistics are currently available), and which are likely to form part of the Audit Commission's best value framework for community safety.

<sup>17</sup> Lynn, P. and D. Elliot (2000). *The British Crime Survey: a review of methodology*. London: National Centre for Social Research.

<sup>18</sup> Audit Commission (2006). *Neighbourhood Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour: making places safer through improved local working*. London: Audit Commission



# 5 Groups with an interest in crime statistics

Evidence gathered for this Review shows that the main groups with an interest in crime statistics are:

- the public;
- central government – in particular the Home Office, Scottish Executive, Northern Ireland Office and Welsh Assembly; and
- organisations responsible for the local delivery of criminal justice system and crime reduction such as the police and other partners within local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.

Other groups include: the research community (both academic and commercial); non governmental organisations; private sector organisations who make use of crime statistics to sell services or identify trends; and the media.

## 5.1 The public

### Interested groups

The public covers a wide range of communities of geography and interest. Analysis of the Delphi responses found that respondents felt that the sections of the public that most commonly use crime-related statistics were:

- older people;
- previous victims of crime; and
- parents.

A recent study by the Audit Commission also identifies the range of sources, uses and users of crime statistics relevant at both district and neighbourhood level.<sup>19</sup> In particular, statistics are of concern to those from or interested in demographic groups that are most commonly the subject of discrimination. Within the Delphi study, respondents were asked to indicate where the provision of information on diversity and discrimination by crime-related statistics were inadequate. Responses suggested that this was not considered to be a sizable issue in relation to:

- gender;
- age; and
- ethnicity.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

However, responses also suggested that it was a more significant issue in statistics relating to:

- disability;
- social class; and
- faith.

## 5.2 Central government

The central government departments with principal responsibility for crime and crime reduction across all parts of the United Kingdom collect, publish and disseminate similar crime-related statistics.

### Home Office

The Home Office is the principal agency responsible for collecting, producing and disseminating crime statistics in England and Wales. The key crime statistics that it has responsibility for include: national police-recorded crime figures drawn from the 43 forces in England and Wales; and the BCS which covers England and Wales.

It also produces statistics in relation to criminal justice processes, prison statistics and offender related statistics. Its Research Development Statistics department also conducts and commissions research on specific crime issues.

### Scottish Executive

The Scottish Executive collects produces and publishes a range of crime statistics including: police-recorded crime figures for the 8 Scottish forces; the results of the Scottish Crime Survey; and modular reports on specific crime type related issues such as drugs misuse and young people and crime.

The Executive also produces statistics on such issues as: offender related matters, prison population and criminal justice proceedings.

### Northern Ireland Office

The Northern Ireland Office Statistics and Research branch maintains databases on recorded crime, court proceedings and sentencing, juvenile justice and prisons in relation to Northern Ireland.

It is responsible for the publication and dissemination of these statistics and commissions other pieces of research on a range of issues including topics associated with the Northern Ireland Criminal Justice Review.

## Welsh Assembly Government

In Wales, crime and criminal justice is a non-devolved function which rests with the Home Office. The Welsh Assembly Government does not produce crime or criminal justice statistics for Wales; this is the responsibility of the Home Office. It does, however, produce some crime-related statistics as part of its devolved social, regeneration and housing functions.

## 5.3 Local organisations responsible for the delivery of the criminal justice system and crime reduction

A range of regional, countywide and local agencies and partnerships have responsibility for delivering crime reduction and criminal justice. Examples of the principal bodies that operate in England and Wales are considered below. Agencies with the same or similar responsibilities operate in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

### Police

As detailed in 4.1 above, the police produce recorded crime statistics which are made available locally and regionally to the public, other agencies and the media. Data are used for tactical purposes to direct policing activities and to assess police performance.

### Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) have a statutory obligation to produce and publish a tri-annual audit of local crime statistics (including police and trends. Following recommendations contained in the recent Review of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998<sup>20</sup> the audits are likely to be replaced by six monthly strategic intelligence assessments following the police National Intelligence Model. This represents an increasing convergence between the police and partnerships in the tactical use of recorded crime statistics for operational and strategic purposes.

CDRPs like the police are subject to performance assessment and monitor their performance against targets negotiated with regional government offices through data systems such as IQUANTA<sup>21</sup> drawn from the Police Performance Assessment Framework (see 7.1.2)

<sup>20</sup> Review of the partnership arrangements of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 – Report of findings January 2006 Home Office

<sup>21</sup> iQuanta is an internet-based analysis tool which was developed by the Police Standards Unit. It is used to turn statistical data routinely collected by the Home Office into outputs which can be used to gain a better understanding, and to improve policing performance.

CDRPs are attempting to address some of the criminological and policy issues identified in 4.2 and 4.3 by gathering and using statistics and data from: local fear of crime surveys; quality of life surveys; citizens panels; focus groups; and data related to offenders offender management. More information on this can be found in Appendix 9.

## **Regional Government Offices**

The Crime Reduction Teams within regional government offices in England and the Welsh Assembly Government's are playing an increasing role in:

- supporting the development of more rigorous statistical measurement of crime locally and regionally;
- collecting and analysing statistical data at a regional level; and
- monitoring performance of local agencies against statistical measures provided by data systems such as IQQUANTA.

## **5.4 Research community**

The research community covers a range of roles and interests that include:

- academic criminologists who work in Universities. Many of these are based in criminology departments, although some will also be based in sociology, geography and law departments. Research using crime statistics (both BCS and recorded crime) has been central to the evolution of criminology as an academic discipline – both for what they might say about the nature of crime; and about what they can say about the principles and operations of the criminal justice system (both comprising the legitimate subject matter of the discipline)
- undergraduate students pursuing degrees in criminology or degrees with a criminological component;
- post-doctoral students studying and researching criminological subjects, many of which will be professionals from the crime reduction and criminal justice sectors; and
- commercial organisations undertaking contract research. Primarily this will be research and survey work undertaken for central and local government.

The Review found that academics and those with relevant skills generally preferred raw data sources, than those that have been pre-analysed. Of those responding to the Delphi survey who use crime-related statistics as part of their work, the primary sources appeared to be the Home Office website, which it was suggested, would be most particularly useful to the local government, the media and to academics. Additionally, it was thought that these same groups of individuals would make use of police websites to gather information.

#### Delphi participant

“Generally speaking, only larger commercial enterprises will have the necessary resources to analyse this type of information. Smaller enterprises may benefit from greater sharing of crime-related information, as their individual experiences may be too limited to build up a picture of risk”

## 5.5 Private sector organisations

Private sector organisations will have a variety of interests in crime statistics. One set of interests will be similar to those of individual members of the public:

- as members of local communities who provide services and draw employees from those communities;
- as victims of crime; and
- as tax payers.

However, private sector organisations will also have a set of interests that relate to their potential to act as the collectors of statistics that have some value as crime statistics. Often private organisations will collect statistics for primary purposes other than measuring crime (eg stock control, customer fraud, theft by staff, violence against staff, criminal damage to property) but nevertheless such data will have potential uses as a crime statistic;

Detailed statistics relating to commercial crime and fraud is collected and held at an organisation level by individual companies. Aggregated statistics drawn from company data are collected at the UK national level by trade associations and made publicly available principally in the form of surveys.

Some local data about crime incidents and intelligence on perpetrators are collected by local business crime reduction partnerships based on reports by members, some of which are held as local data as part of a national data warehousing facility.

## 5.6 Media

Coverage of crime statistics now occurs in all news media. The media play a hugely important role in mediating public perceptions of crime, and crime plays an important part in the outputs of the mass media. Research suggests that the extent of coverage of crime in the newspapers has increased upwards to around 20 per cent of news stories – including the proportion of crime news stories covering the criminal justice system (which includes press coverage of crime statistics)<sup>22</sup>. This increase has coincided with the growth in the importance of the media in representing and shaping cultural and political life, in what is now a symbiotic relationship between them. It may no longer be possible (if it ever was) to ascertain whether it is the media that determine or merely reflect public opinion about crime.<sup>23</sup>

The increasing importance of media coverage of crime statistics is not surprising, in view of the following factors:

- the greater political significance of law and order<sup>24</sup>;
- the relationship between politics, government and the media in contemporary governance; and
- the greater centrality of risk and risk calculation in contemporary life and politics<sup>25</sup>.

It is unsurprising, given this raising of the stakes, that debate about the news coverage of crime statistics should also be fraught with misunderstanding and mutual recrimination.

<sup>22</sup> Reiner, R. (2002). 'Media made criminality: the representation of crime in the mass media'. In M. Maguire *et al.* (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology: 3rd Edition*. Oxford: OUP

<sup>23</sup> Reiner, *op cit.*

<sup>24</sup> Downes, D. and R. Morgan (2002). 'The skeletons in the cupboard: the politics of law and order at the turn of the millenium'. *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology: 3rd Edition*. Oxford: OUP

<sup>25</sup> Franklin, J. (1998) (Ed.) *The Politics of Risk Society*. IPPR. Cambridge: Polity.

# 6 Purposes for which crime statistics are used

## 6.1 National government and local delivery organisations

National government and local delivery organisations have three main purposes that they wish to use crime statistics to help fulfil:

- policy and implementation;
- performance management; and
- communicating with the public.

### 6.1.1 Policy and implementation

Crime statistics now form part of a modern regime of statutory governance systems for regulating the criminal justice system and its agencies, primarily through the measurement of performance. Section 5.3 discusses the tactical use of crime statistics by the police, CDRPs and Regional Government Offices. As it provides quarterly rolling data BCS can be slow to show the changes in some policies making it difficult for the police services to understand the impact of some policies implies as soon as it would like. This can mean that it can be difficult to test the impacts of alternative approaches. Whilst for many crimes the BCS does not show major fluctuations on a quarterly basis, there have been areas where BCS has shown significant increases in crime rates and has an impact on policing approaches.

### 6.1.2 Managing performance

Crime statistics are also used to manage performance, in terms of both monitoring performance and managing improvements. Uses of crime statistics for managing performance was also discussed in section 5.3.

### 6.1.3 Communicating with the public

There has been some prescriptive research about how crime statistics could be used by government to communicate with the public. Criminological research interest here has reflected and played a part in shaping what is now officially perceived to be the over-arching purpose for collecting information on crime – “to reduce the impact of crime on society”<sup>26</sup>. This specifically instrumental definition of the use of crime statistics is a relatively new one, largely emerging as part of the Home Office *modernisation agenda*<sup>27</sup>, and reflecting the policy priorities of the Government.

<sup>26</sup> Simmons Report, 2000, paragraph 5

<sup>27</sup> Simmons Report, 2000, paragraph 2

## 6.2 The public

### 6.2.1 Purpose

The Delphi responses suggested perceptions of national crime statistics may be used by the public to hold Government to account in terms of violence and anti-social behaviour. In addition, statistics that are available at a more local level may similarly be used to hold police and local authorities and police to account.

Within the Delphi questionnaires, applications were presented for which crime-statistics were most useful for the public (based on comments from the expert seminar). Respondents were asked to indicate the most useful four in their opinions, and were then asked to rank these in the second questionnaire. It was generally felt that the following five uses represent the main reasons that individuals use crime-related statistics:

- assessing the performance of the authorities in tackling crime;
- understanding policy development by government;
- understanding the causes of crime, victimisation and offending;
- determining personal risk and susceptibility to crime; and
- informing the public of criminal activity in their area.

### 6.2.2 Understanding of crime

The Review has suggested that although the public have some understanding of crime statistics on the whole they do not specifically make an effort to keep abreast of trends. In particular, crime statistics are only one of a number of sources of information that the public use when making decisions in their everyday lives, and that they do not use them to make precise calculations about the risks they could face from crime. Indeed, although the public may use crime-related statistics to assess performance of local agencies, or who to vote for, and to assess levels of risk of victimisation, they are more strongly influenced by local factors. This was reflected by the comment below, taken from one of the Delphi participants. This comment is indicative of a general theme amongst the responses.

#### Delphi participant

“Most members of the public work on perception which is not based on statistics. If statistics conflict with their perception or belief, they just don’t trust the statistics. It’s not a question of what information is available. Perceptions are based on media reports, experience of friends & family, and in some cases irrational fear. Put statistics against these and it’s no contest”

### 6.2.3 Assessing risk

Evidence from the Delphi exercise suggested that anecdotal ‘evidence’ from friends and family are more likely to influence perceptions than crime figures, which are not always robust, and which do not facilitate easy comparison of one area with another. In the main, individuals generally do not actually use statistics about crime in many major decisions within their lives. Ultimately by the perceptions of friends and relatives<sup>28</sup>, rather than statistics. Where individuals do look for direct crime statistics, it was anticipated that the most likely source of this would be via the Home Office website. Comments from the Delphi participants highlight some of these perceptions.

#### Delphi participant

“My experience suggests that the public do not use sources such as their LA or police to tell them about crime in their neighbourhood”

“I doubt if many people go directly to the HO [Home Office] publications. Therefore their usefulness depends entirely on the medium through which what information they get is filtered.”

Individuals lack faith in statistics widely where they seem to conflict with their own experiences. However if data were available at a lower level, such as street level, this may be more reflective of the experiences people face and therefore prompt them to consult the statistics more in making decisions.

### 6.2.4 Determining vulnerability

There is by no means a perfect correlation between individuals’ actual risk of crime and their fear of it. For instance, analysis of the British Social Attitudes Survey suggested that worry about crime was linked to a range of other social attitudes<sup>29</sup>. This was reflected by the comments below, made by Delphi participants.

<sup>28</sup> See also Skogan, W.G. and M. Maxfield (1981). *Coping with Crime: individual and neighbourhood reactions*. Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage Publications.

<sup>29</sup> Dowds, L. and D. Ahrendt (1995) ‘Fear of crime’ in R. Jowell *et al.* (Ed) *British Social Attitudes: 12th Report*. Aldershot, Hants.: Dartmouth.

### Delphi participant

“The natural assumption is that high levels of anxiety/fear are a response to high levels of crime/nuisance. In fact the relationship between the two is complex and poorly understood.”

“In my force area, the level of recorded crime is high per head of population but the fear of crime is one of the lowest. This asks various questions such as are we recording too much (or others too little)?, does reducing the fear of crime mean that local people want to report crime, etc... The list could go on, but the simple answer is that we don't know as the statistics do not let us 'dig down' far enough.”

It is important to note that peoples' perceptions of vulnerability influence their fear of crime, which is examined in various literature.<sup>30 31</sup> It is also questionable whether it is actually desirable for measures of worry to decline much further; some fear of crime is important, as it encourages healthy prevention precautions being taken. For instance, if individuals had no fear of crime, they may neglect to lock doors etc.<sup>32</sup>

Individuals do not base their fear of crime upon realistic data, and even within wards there can be significant variation in the level of risk of crime, and people do not have a true image of how likely they really are to be victims of crime. Fear of crime is thus poorly judged because of the lack of context that is published alongside crime statistics. Frequently people hear about crimes in their area and assess the risk they are in based on raw numbers. However, this generally means that they tend to overstate their perception of risk since in the example of kidnappings, these tend to relate more to specific instances, such as where a drug deal has gone wrong rather than being random incidents. An interview with the Metropolitan Police Service as part of one of the case studies examined this issue and is considered in greater depth in Appendix 3.

## 6.3 Making national and international crime comparisons

The media often seek to make comparisons both nationally and internationally for public interest and as a comment on government performance, whilst for more those involved in policy development and research, the ability to compare at some level can create greater cross-cultural analysis and understanding of the causation of

<sup>30</sup> Ditton, J. *et al.* (1999). 'Afraid or angry? Recalibrating the "fear" of crime.' *International Review of Victimology*, 6, 83-99.

<sup>31</sup> Farrall, S. and Gadd, D. (2004). 'Research Note: The Frequency of the Fear of Crime.' *British Journal of Criminology*, 44: 127-132.

<sup>32</sup> T. Hope and A. Trickett (2004) 'Angst Essen Seele Auf...but it keeps away the burglars! private security, neighbourhood watch and the social reaction to crime'. *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 43, 441-468.

crime. In turn, this can play a key role in informing policy development. However, there are many methodological and political issues associated with trying to compare crime statistics across countries, In this section we consider:

- intra-national comparison; and
- international comparison.

### 6.3.1 Intra-national comparisons

At present it is not possible to easily compare UK countries. The BCS no longer covers the whole of Britain, and although the Scottish crime survey exists, this has been run on a different basis. Thus, there are two different surveys, which are run using different methods and asking different questions, making comparison of these data particularly difficult. This is coupled with the issue that, as a devolved administration, Scotland has different governance, which in turn has implications for the comparability of countries. For more detail on inter country comparison see Appendix 6.

#### The lack of harmonisation

Within the Delphi study there was strong agreement among respondents that harmonisation of crime statistics within the UK is both politically desirable and technically feasible. It was felt that it would be particularly useful to be able to compare major cities throughout the UK. This is illustrated in the comment, below, from the Delphi study.

##### Delphi participant

“It would be of particular use to Londoners. The unique difference between London and the rest of the UK is not in volume or even in complexity – it is simply the fact that crime patterns get overlaid on an environment that is the most multi cultural, cosmopolitan and has the greatest variety of deprivation. Add to this the attritional nature of London politics, the antagonistic and sensationalist local media, and the effect is significant.”

Although a less satisfactory solution, experts at the seminar suggested that whilst Scotland and the rest of the UK have small differences in their recording basis, the impact on crime figures is likely to be at the margins. Therefore, it would be possible to transform data to get comparable figures in general and whilst marginal differences between these figures would be meaningless because of the possibility of them being a product of differences in the recording basis, if there were larger gaps then it would be possible to draw conclusions that there are real differences in crime patterns. Further investigation is required to determine whether this is feasible.

### 6.3.2 International comparison

Whilst there appears to be a public demand for international comparison there is a danger associated with this in that the complexities of comparison resulting from methodological difficulties, get overlooked in the presentation of these figures. As such, issues around the presentation of these comparisons will need to be considered carefully. However, whilst there is some public demand for comparison, it is largely considered to be most useful for policy makers and for criminal justice practitioners. In addition, the ability to compare internationally can also help to ensure that EU funds are directed appropriately.

Although international victimisation surveys currently exist, these are of limited value with the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) being comprised of small national sample sizes. Recent work in Scotland indicated problems with telephone based surveys, which is the methodology used in the ICVS. Additionally there are other surveys which exist which include different levels of data such as regional comparisons, like the Eurobarometer, or various topical surveys focusing on specific issues.

#### Difficulties of international comparison

Whilst Delphi participants considered it to be desirable to have international comparisons of crime-related statistics, there are significant barriers. These include:

- different legal systems can present significant problems, with crimes being defined differently. The extent to which this is a problem is highlighted by the example of differing laws, such that a crime in one country may actually be a freedom in another, such as the case of laws on gun control in Europe as compared to the US.
- issues around legal approaches mean that it will be difficult to compare some issues, such as the prison populations which are strongly affected by legislative changes.
- differences in the general level of administrative development, meaning that differences may be the result of different levels of sophistication in record keeping rather than actual differences. In particular, countries can have very different penal systems, causing statistical comparisons to be inherently difficult. This is quite apparent in the area of recorded crime, where some countries (such as UK with NCRS) record crime when it is first reported to the authorities, whereas in other countries, it is only recorded much later in the process, at which point the total number may have suffered considerable attrition.

- for a variety of cultural, technological and political reasons, different countries also have different levels of willingness to report different types of crime to the police, which will impact on the levels of crime recorded rather than the levels committed. Thus a country which is proactively encouraging people to report crimes so that problems can be addressed, could look to be performing worse than a country that is not encouraging victims to report it, and therefore the problem is not acknowledged.

#### Delphi participants

“The way crime is measured varies widely across countries hence comparison is at best meaningless and worst misleading.”

“Information about trends more achievable than direct comparisons. Given the difficulty around direct comparisons any information for the public is likely to be misinterpreted.”

“The general public have a right to know whether they are more at risk of certain crimes than other countries would be; but such analyses need to take into account both the differences in crime measures and CJS systems but also cultural differences; and also differences in measurement bases.”

“There is already a strong media interest in comparisons between different countries[....]International comparisons can help open up perspectives on what is achievable in policing and what approaches have already been tried”

“Although crime has been falling in the UK for some years it is useful to be able to point out that it has been falling all over the place. Important for politicians; less for public and commerce.”

A number of strategies have been employed to try and help counter or avoid these issues. These have included:

- only comparing countries that are very similar. The European Sourcebook<sup>33</sup> helps identify similar countries;
- restricting the crimes compared, so that only those not impacted by the specific pitfalls are included, such as homicide, although even in this most serious category of crime there are significant measurement issues; and

<sup>33</sup> The first European Sourcebook project started in 1996. In that year the Council of Europe established a committee to prepare a compendium of crime and criminal justice data for its member states. Information was collected from 36 European countries covering the period 1990 to 1996. It included both statistical data and information on the statistical rules and the definitions behind these figures. This resulted in the publication by the Council of Europe of the Sourcebook in 1999, now also available on-line.

- using data collected from international crime and victimisation surveys, which are collected independently of the official systems. However, there are limitations on the usefulness of these because of differences in methodologies, cultural attitudes to crime and coverage of the various surveys.

## Conclusion

Generally, this Review suggests that these purposes are confused and imperfectly applied by the general public. The box below shows some comments made by Delphi participants.

### Delphi participants

“I think the general public use crime-related statistics very rarely to help make decisions. Ironically; they worry about crime; but have low levels of knowledge about crime levels.”

“I think very few members of the public use crime-related statistics in a considered way when making decisions. They may think I won't live in Brixton because it's rough but they don't look up statistics.”

Furthermore, citizens rely upon others to assist them:

- government/producers to release statistics appropriately;
- media to report/communicate statistics; and
- government/academics/commentators/interest groups to interpret statistics and apply them to citizens' needs.

Both government and local crime reduction and criminal justice delivery organisations are also unclear about the purposes the public have that they may wish to use crime statistics to help fulfil.

# 7 Fitness for Purpose of crime statistics

This section will examine the fitness for purpose for national government and local crime reduction and criminal justice delivery organisations and the public. It will also consider the potential to use regulation as a way of making statistics more fit for purpose.

## 7.1 National government and local crime reduction and criminal justice delivery organisations

### 7.1.1 Policy and implementation

#### **Recorded crime data**

Recorded crime statistics are of limited use as a tool for policy making at a national level for a number of reasons. They are influenced by the:

- willingness of the public to report crime;
- legal definitions of crime and recording practices<sup>34</sup> ; and
- lack of contextual data about the crimes recorded (eg information about victims or offenders who committed the crimes).

At a local level, the lack of granularity of the BCS (see below) means that recorded crime data are more widely used to formulate local policy and address local implementation.

Local delivery organisations focus primarily on implementation of national policy. Relevant movements in local policy and implementation include:

- problem-oriented policing;
- intelligence-led policing;
- situational crime prevention; and
- drug-market analysis.

<sup>34</sup> T. Hope (2005). 'What do crime statistics tell us?'. In C. Hale, K. Hayward, A. Wahidin and E. Wincup (Eds.). *Criminology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Crime data are being used increasingly in *intelligence systems* to help target, direct and monitor crime reduction operations. The service-wide adoption in policing of the *National Intelligence Model (NIM)* gives an overall framework for this activity. In particular, there is interest in targeting concentrations of crime, including:

- prolific and other priority offenders;
- repeat victimisation;
- crime hot-spots; and
- hot products (most stolen goods).

Various data-handling and analysis techniques and systems have been adopted, most notably *Geographical Information Systems* and other spatial analysis techniques.

In general, the evidence base for these techniques and approaches is more contentious and less reliable than their widespread adoption presupposes<sup>35</sup> Dissemination of these approaches has been the responsibility of the Home Office Research Development and Statistics (RDS), and its expert advisers. There have been relatively few reliable published evaluations of their efficacy, in particular on the use of crime statistics within them. Neither does the criminological theory underpinning them have widespread or unconditional support within the international academic criminological community.

## **The BCS**

### **Crime**

The BCS was created primarily as a research tool to support central government policy making. It is generally recognised to provide a more accurate reflection of public experiences and perceptions of crime and the fear of crime. It also provides extensive contextual information about the crimes it records, including detailed information about victim, situation and causal factors. However, the BCS does have some limitations as a policy tool for exploring crime:

<sup>35</sup> See Hope, T. (2006). 'Things can only get better'. *Criminal Justice Matters*. No. 62 Winter 2005/06; Hope, T. (2006) Review of 'Crime Science' (Smith and Tilley), *Theoretical Criminology*, 10 (2), 245-50.

**Figure 2: Limitations of the BCS as a policy tool for exploring crime**

Limitations	Explanation of limitation
<i>Costs of crime</i>	The BCS provides only limited information about impact on victims and this is not broad enough in scope to cover the range of issues which need to be considered for benefits valuation purposes.
<i>Selection bias</i>	Despite being a large victimisation study, a number of groups in society are not reached by the BCS. In particular, the BCS has difficulty in accessing the potentially most vulnerable, for instance, those living in unsecured housing, institutions and young people. Additionally, the BCS obviously excludes those that don't know they have been a victim (eg in some fraud cases), those who are incapable of reporting their victimisation (eg deceased persons, the very ill and infirm) and crimes against corporate bodies (again there are separate surveys of commercial victimisation). It was suggested at the expert seminar that it might be interesting to carry out a study on refusal rates and calls-back to try and understand the extent and character of non-response, for instance, to link response and refusal rates to other data sets. All of these selection 'biases' limit the amount of crime that the BCS is capable of counting and the extent to which it can provide a full picture of crime.
<i>Young people</i>	<p>A substantial proportion of crime victimisation is experienced by young people, however, young people are not included in the BCS. Young people are included in the Offending, Crime and Justice survey which is also undertaken by the Home Office and to some extent allows for comparison of youth and adult victimisation, although the degree of analysis is limited by the size of the sample.</p> <p>While it is acknowledged that regular national crime victimisation surveys in Scotland and Northern Ireland would produce benefits similar to that of the BCS for England and Wales, the major factor affecting any decision to do this would be scale and cost. The various sampling considerations that lead to large samples in the case of BCS produce disproportionate burdens on devolved budgets in the administrations with smaller and less dense populations without benefiting from the economies of scale in sample design achievable in England and Wales.</p>

### Fear of crime

The BCS also has limitations as a policy tool for examining fear of crime.

**Fear of crime as a policy driver:** Over recent years there has been increasing political debate regarding the importance of and trends in fear of crime. Although used as a measure of performance for the police (HO PSA2) the extent to which statistics measuring fear of crime are actually related to true levels either of 'fear' or of crime, and to the performance of police authorities in tackling crime, is not clear. There is also a danger that setting too much value on fear of crime can drive policy inappropriately, with resources being targeted to combat fear, where fear is high, to the detriment of utilising resources where they are specifically required to prevent crime.

At the expert seminar, it was also noted that there is a danger of people not using the data accurately and raising the fear of crime to promote their own goals. For example, there is an obvious opportunity for political parties to play off of fear of crime under one government to use this to promote themselves. The comment from the Delphi study below reflects one of the themes of responses to the survey.

#### **Delphi participant**

“[...]sometimes fear of crime drives action unfairly. The police and criminal justice system should not necessarily pander to people’s fears, and instead should concentrate on real problems.”

Fear of crime measures have limitations in determining policy or operations as they do not clearly indicate the problems to be addressed. Collecting specific information on problems in areas (eg by means of visual audits) may be of more use.

**Conceptualising the fear of crime:** There has been a debate over recent years about whether the BCS asks the most effective possible questions. At the expert seminar, it was noted that knowledge of fear of crime has changed since the original BCS questions were designed in the early 1980s and in particular, criminologists are now more aware of and draw more on relevant psychological research and literature. However, the BCS provides an important time series which allows trends to be measured. If questions were changed, analysis of long-term trends would be compromised.

Against this, the collection of all crime data has a cost. Solutions suggested have included continuing with the original questions in the BCS in the short term alongside new (and better) ones, in order to preserve the measurement of trends or keeping new questions in the BCS for a short period to monitor differences rather than the costly option of running of all questions concurrently. The BCS has already adopted some additional measures of fear, in this way. However, BCS does not provide information at a sufficient level of granularity to reflect how fear of crime levels may differ. Fear of crime can be significantly affected by the level of information available to individuals and as such statistics may vary, and should be influenced by even the street that people live in.

### Delphi participants

“Public perception is prima facie a valid measure of fear of crime; but the wide confidence limits associated with BCS results at local level mean that even quite large differences between areas or over time are not statistically significant [...]such perception is not a constant measure over time; and may well be subject to high profile events given a lot of media attention.”

“Fear of crime is an outdated concept; inadequately linked to crime. It should be dropped completely, and replaced by information about perceptions of whether crime has increased or decreased (already in the BCS).”

“[...]there is evidence to suggest they are not actually tapping into public anxiety about crime; but anxiety generally and are therefore poor measures.”

## 7.1.2 Performance management

Recorded crime statistics are used to measure police and CDRP performance, more so since the introduction of PPAF.

### National Crime Recording Standard

Historically, the debate about the fitness for purpose of crime statistics as a performance measure has been influenced by tensions between performance pressures and police crime recording, that a proper application of the NCRS is intended to eradicate. Detailed discussions about this issue have taken place between Home Office Statisticians and Force Crime Registrars (FCRs) via the National Crime Recording Steering Group. The role of the police and the FCRs in maintaining data integrity is critical.

Of the crime that comes to its attention (i.e. that which is reported by the public), the National Crime Reporting System has now probably managed to attain the best ever standard of recording – due both to its procedures, its administrative system (Data Registrars network), and the auditing of compliance (which has encouraged compliance). The NCRS has also instituted a ‘methodology’ so that difficulties and anomalies and problems in definition/recording can be tackled systematically; this is also great progress – a system that will ensure future integrity of recorded crime.

## Police Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF)

Both at the expert seminar, and within the Delphi study, concern was raised about a number of statistical issues:

- construction of indicators: concern was raised about bringing together a number of variables representing a range of police activities, outputs and outcomes into a single measure, and in particular, the ranking of police forces according to those measures;
- capturing resources: it was felt by some that the way in which PPAF represents police resources does not reflect the complexity of the various inputs;
- granularity: it is important that measures are at a suitable level of detail that it is useful and meaningful, whilst ensuring that it is not possible to identify individuals; and
- it was also asked whether there should be a focus on statistics less as an outcome and more as part of the process. Thus, statistics should be used as a guide for developing policy and changing behaviour, rather than as an absolute measure of performance.

## BCS

When it was created in 1981 the BCS was seen primarily as a research tool to inform policy development. However, over the last 25 years, the use of the BCS and the resultant statistics has focused more on performance measurement, which in turn has implications for the appropriate use of all types of crime statistics. This is illustrated in the comment from one of the Delphi participants below.

### Delphi participants

“Statistics are now being heavily used as a tool to enable central control over operational deployment and activity of police and other criminal justice services. Such use is inappropriate as this approach fails to take into account the needs of local communities and individual circumstances in each case. The tool is too blunt. If the pressures to achieve set statistical results are too great and local circumstances are not taken into account adequately there is a significant risk created.”

As victimisation is a rare event, there is a need for a large sample in order to capture the less common types of crime victimisation. However, even with an annual sample of around 45,000, the BCS is only capable of providing information at police force level, Yet much local policy about crime reduction is made at the level of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (district, metropolitan and unitary local government level), areas which are smaller than police force areas. Also, following recent proposals from the Home Office it is likely that many forces will be amalgamated in

future years<sup>36</sup> (although a requirement for force or sub force-level data is likely to remain) which may also have implications for the present BCS sampling structure.

## Conclusion

In the context of performance measurement there is a danger that performance management focuses on those things that are measurable (eg the Best Value Performance Indicators focused on Burglary and Vehicle Crime) and either distort local priorities or fail to capture important aspects of organisational performance. But, this is primarily an issue for the design of the performance management system, not the recorded crime statistics and is therefore beyond the scope of this Review. Leaving aside concerns about performance management systems the extent to which recorded crime statistics are dependent on counting rules and the collection process is a limitation on their use. The strongest example of this is probably violent crime.

### 7.1.3 Communication

National government and local crime reduction and criminal justice delivery organisations wish to communicate with the public. Currently, the Home Office publishes regular statistical bulletins that include both findings from the BCS and recorded crime statistics that focus on national crime trends. However, because it is not clear what it is that they want to communicate to the public it is difficult to assess whether the crime data that are available to government and local delivery organisations are fit for purpose.

#### Communicating about local crime

A key issue for national government and local delivery organisations is communicating about local crime and fear of crime.

Local data are published both by the Home Office and locally. For instance, the Home Office published recorded crime statistics broken down to CDRP on the Home Office website.

#### Delphi participant

“Often o [sic] look for a very specific statistic and the publication has analysed too far. I like the excel spreadsheets you can download as the data is nice and raw and easier to manipulate in the way I want. However, I realise this is because I have the skills/inclination to do so. I think it’s slightly patronising to suggest that having both the BSC and the recorded crime stats confuses people. It should be better explained”

<sup>36</sup> O’Connor, D. (2005). *Closing the Gap: a review of the ‘fitness for purpose’ of the current structure of policing in England and Wales*. London: HM Inspectorate of Constabulary.

However, this is based on police-recorded crime data, which have significant limitations.

#### **Delphi participant**

“[...]it is very important to remember that police recorded crime data only to tell us about crimes recorded by the police, therefore such data is only useful in terms of analysing ‘known’ crime at the local level.”

Some data are also published at a local level which is available through various sources, such as the local police website or through the Safer Neighbourhoods. Key limitations of local data that were identified during the Review include:

- insufficient granularity;
- the statistics are too meaningless on their own; and
- data quality.

#### **Insufficient granularity**

Many crime-related statistics do not drill down to a sufficient level of granularity and therefore fail to inform the public about criminal activity or their susceptibility to crime at the level of their own neighbourhood. Recorded crime figures can be computed at neighbourhood level, and below, but these are usually made available to the public partially and selectively as part of local partnership operations. Neither the British nor the Scottish Crime Surveys (BCS/SCS) have been designed to allow data to be disaggregated below regional (BCS) or national (SCS) level, and only recently has the BCS been capable of disaggregation to individual police service level, at a greatly increased sample size (and cost). By linking data from the Census, it has been possible to make inferences from these surveys about likely neighbourhood factors in victimisation, risk and feelings of security, and to make estimated interpolations to real neighbourhoods (via geo-coded linkages). The Home Office has also worked with 13 police forces and ONS Neighbourhood Statistics to generate experimental police-recorded crime data for 2003/4 at the middle super output area level (roughly 7,000 people) and the intention is to extend this to England and Wales as a whole of the next two years. Data relating to this are available at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/crimeew0405.html>.

There is potential to present police data at street level but they generally do not have the resources to make this possible. Street level information has been shared with some Safer Neighbourhood teams, but unless there were greater resources available this could not be done more widely. Additionally, as with linking more BCS data, issues around data protection and confidentiality have been cited which have limited or restricted the availability of data that would facilitate such analyses. There are also questions regarding the desirability of this level of data. If individuals felt that reporting

a crime would make them identifiable, then this would inevitably impact on the likelihood of them reporting the crime, particularly in cases such as domestic violence.

#### Delphi participant

“Recorded crime data is as accurate as it has ever been, and is quality assured as never before. However all that it describes is what is reported, a subset of what has occurred. BCS data lacks granularity to provide real local information. The collection of this recorded data is excessively costly against the benefit provided by having an investigation applied to every incident recorded as a crime. Meaningful analysis could be achieved without things having to be a recorded crime. The storey [sic] could be better told and understood.”

“BCS data are only available to the public for highly-aggregated geographical areas[...]this is a good thing. [Otherwise] a respondent who had suffered an unusual offence for a small area, or a series of offences there of, could potentially be identified.”

The recent report from the Audit Commission on *Neighbourhood Crime and Anti-social Behaviour* addresses the problems posed for the government’s evolving local delivery framework by the lack of granularity of crime data at neighbourhood-level<sup>37</sup>. A variety of techniques and approaches are suggested based upon the techniques of *Geo-demographic Information* and the technologies of *Geographic Information Systems (GIS)*. Application of these may in future overcome some of the obstacles to attaining greater granularity, and generally in making better use of local data, without necessitating investment in large-scale and often prohibitively expensive primary data collection. ONS attempted to extrapolate from the BCS sample points to the country as a whole as part of their work on Neighbourhood Statistics. They were discouraged as their results pointed to estimates of BCS crime levels being very variable. However, they may have had more success if they had instead attempted to estimate the longer term propensity for small local areas to be higher or lower crime areas.

#### Statistics lack context

Crime statistics only provide facts and cannot provide insight into behaviour. To make the data useful they need to be considered in the context of other information, such as changes in legislation, or changes in alcohol consumption which drives changes in domestic violence. Equally, contextual information can help people to their own risk and understand the drivers of changes.

<sup>37</sup> Audit Commission (2006). *Neighbourhood Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour: making places safer through improved local working*.

## **Data quality**

Whilst many acknowledge that the quality of data in some areas is now of a very high standard, there were concerns that not all data are of the same standard. In particular, where other data are used at a local level, perhaps as part of a CDRP's Crime and Disorder Audit, it was suggested that datasets based on administrative systems used by different local agencies contain errors on entry, and little validation at point of entry. Further, there is not enough consistency in the datasets, making it difficult for people to interpret them usefully.

## **Reliance on media to get out key messages**

When examining the Home Office's approach to communicating key messages about national crime statistics it appeared that the Home Office places considerable reliance on using the media, both national and local as its main communication channel. We discuss the media's role in crime statistics in detail elsewhere in this report, and in particular in Appendix 5. However, it is clear that the media follows an agenda that is independent of national government agencies and this therefore seems a high-risk strategy for the Home Office to pursue.

## **Scotland**

Within the Delphi study it was noted that the extent and level of statistics available in Scotland is particularly poor in respect to the uses of statistics identified earlier. It was suggested that there are not sufficient surveys of victims or offenders with which to properly understand the causes of crime or properly evaluate susceptibility to crime.

### **Delphi participant**

"The extent and level of statistics available in Scotland is particularly poor for measuring these criteria. There are not sufficient surveys of either victims or offenders to be able to understand the causes of crime or victimisation or to properly evaluate susceptibility to crime, data are not available at a low enough geography to be of use in informing the public of criminal activity at local levels or to properly assess the performance of local authorities in tackling crime, and insufficient information is collected by which to properly inform policy development"

## 7.2 The public

Generally, the crime statistics available to the public are not fit for the purposes that the public wish to put them to. There are four main reasons for this:

- limitations with the statistics themselves;
- the role of the media as a mediator between raw crime statistics and public consumption;
- lack of trust in statistics by the public; and
- the public's ability to interpret crime statistics.

### 7.2.1 Limitations of the statistics

There are some limitations with the current statistics that impact upon their fitness for purpose with the regard to the public. These were:

- lack of local statistics;
- the extent to which statistics reflect public perception of crime (such as summary offences and violent crime);
- interpretation of trends by public; and
- incompleteness of data.

#### **Lack of local statistics**

Many of the purposes the public have for crime statistics relate to their immediate experiences and perceptions of crime within their everyday lives and communities. However, while the Neighbourhood Statistics Service (NeSS) is able to produce national statistics at neighbourhood level, recorded crime statistics are currently only available at police Basic Command Unit (BCU) or Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) level. The BCS lacks sufficient granularity to report on crime at this level. There is a programme of work to develop ward level crime data and the Home Office only recently released a limited pilot data set to NeSS for this purpose. The way in which data are aggregated currently is not helpful as they cover areas which are too large and this can mean that they do not relate to the public's perception of their area and can be confusing. However, to some extent, this is being addressed as the Home Office tries to find alternative ways of matching data without compromising data protection restrictions. The potential to provide data at local level in different formats is also considered in Appendix 3.

### Delphi participant

“I do not think [crime statistics] are that useful to the public because they are too coarse in the area they cover (eg the statistics are aggregate counts that cover large geographic areas) and in some cases too coarse in their description (eg violent crime as a category includes many different crimes including domestic violence; assault; rape and murder – they are very different crimes and mean little without being separated)”

## The extent to which statistics reflect public perception of crime

Recorded crime statistics do not always reflect public perceptions of crime. Two particularly striking examples of this have emerged during this Review.

**Summary offences:** The former *Criminal Statistics* series only included notifiable offences. These were predominantly indictable-only or triable-either-way and include very few summary offences. Although the NCRS has increased the number of summary offences included in the published official figures, a substantial number of summary (non-motoring) offences are not published for England and Wales. Summary offences are likely to account for many of the offences of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and youth crime that are currently recorded<sup>38</sup>. This may have important implications for public perceptions of crime trends since research has shown that public perception is largely influenced by the crimes experienced locally and heard about from others. Thus, regardless of the complexities of recording systems, contradictions with the BCS (see section 5.2) and hidden crime trends (see section 5.4), the fact that the official police-recorded crime statistics do not include most summary offences means they may not reflect most people’s perception of crime and disorder, especially that which occurs in public. This extends to the inclusion of forms of anti-social behaviour which have now been criminalised or which the public has been encouraged to think of as criminal. Summary offences and other means of recording ASB are likely to attain greater official significance in response to the Government’s Respect Agenda and the delivery of HO PSA 2 (Reassuring the public, improving confidence in criminal justice, reducing anti social behaviour).

**Violent recorded crime:** At the expert seminar at the start of the Review<sup>39</sup> it was noted that some banding or weighting of crime could be useful in separating out the most serious categories of crime. For example, with crimes such as ‘violent crime’ some of the real issues and levels of seriousness are hidden by the variety of crimes that this includes. As such it is considered that the current classification and presentation needs to be revised in order for them to be more meaningful. At the lowest level of desegregation there are in excess of 300 separate criminal offences

<sup>38</sup> Flood-Page, C. *et al.* (2000) *Youth Crime: findings from the 1998/99 Youth Lifestyles Survey*. Home Office Research Study 209. London: Home Office.

<sup>39</sup> See also an ACPO submission following the Expert Seminar which is set out in

which are included within this classification, which not surprisingly causes the public a large amount of confusion as they do not understand the distinctions between the different elements.

#### **Delphi participant**

“In some cases too coarse in their description (e.g violent crime as a category includes many different crimes including domestic violence; assault; rape and murder – they are very different crimes and mean little without being separate)”

### **Incompleteness of data**

There is a range of crimes that are not even covered by statistics as there are insufficient data available. One example of this highlighted in the Delphi study is that there is a limited amount of information available to businesses. Although victimisation studies are available these are of limited use.

More than half of the respondents felt that crime statistics do not give a fair, just and honest picture of the involvement in crime, victimisation and offending of minority groups. However, it was also felt that this was something that it might be very difficult to do a lot more about, as many of the subcategories are too small to analyse reliably. Differences that may appear between the groups may then not be statistically significant, making it difficult to draw any conclusions and take appropriate action. The media also has a role to play in diversity, as by sensationalising certain stories they can be responsible for promoting certain stereotypes. Instead of trying to explain differences, they can make blanket statements, which promote very biased views. More information on diversity can be found in Appendix 10.

### **7.2.2 The role of the media**

A detailed consideration of the public use (including trust and understanding) of crime statistics through the mass media is provided by Case Study 4 at Appendix 5. The following combines some of the case study findings with responses to the Delphi study.

## Accuracy of reporting

The media is the public's primary source of crime-related statistics and therefore the accuracy of this data significantly shapes the public perception of crime.

The case study found that:

- The media (which are mainly commercial enterprises) present crime statistics as they do other news, in the context of serving a range of stakeholders/audiences including their: reading/listening/viewing public; editorial voice; shareholders; and advertisers.
- The public are a range of publics which are served by different press and broadcast media. Information is presented to these publics in the way in which the media expect their publics to understand it. They provide the type of information which they understand to be most relevant to those publics. For example, national papers will report on national statistics, regional papers will report on regional statistics.

It was observed that the media think the public is not interested in crime statistics, but is interested in stories about crime. It is these, with their human element, that the tabloid papers in particular, believe sell papers, rather than comparatively dry statistics.

The danger with this is that public perceptions of crime can be based on specific and atypical stories, rather than what is representative of and what is actually happening.

There are a number of ways in which it is believed that the media distorts the information it presents on crime. For instance, the media take unproven assumptions about the causes of crime and link them to crime-related statistics, without statistical analysis to endorse these. For example, this could be implying that elderly are the most at risk from crime when statistics indicate that young men are the most heavily victimised. In turn this can bias public opinion and can falsely raise fear of crime in the wrong groups of individuals, whilst those at risk remain unaware. Equally, a failure to report all the information can distort the picture of crime that is painted. An example of this taken from a comment made within the Delphi study is shown below.

### Delphi participant

"[...] in July 2005 some newspapers reported the 17% increase in sexual offences with no qualification, despite it being made abundantly clear that this increase could be accounted for by a change in the classification of indecent exposure. This is irresponsible journalism, simply stoking up fear."

Political bias within the media was also mentioned as a reason why some believed that the media deliberately aim to distort the presentation of crime statistics, as shown below in the comments from Delphi participants.

### Delphi participants

“The media will generally pick on the most dramatic and alarming statistics for fairly short articles and there may be limits to how much the government could and should control this process. The public have also become sceptical of perceived ‘spin’ from central government in presenting facts and figures.”

“[the public] get crime figures via the media, and all the footnotes and explanations in the world will not stop journalists from cherry-picking the figures that best support the story they want to write.”

### Media understanding of crime statistics

The case study found that:

- Journalists who specialise in covering home affairs/crime are able to understand crime statistics and for example recognise the differences between the data provided by the police-recorded crime figures and BCS results;
- In addition these journalists were aware of, understood and used other crime-related statistics such as: statistics regarding offenders and offending and criminal justice statistics; and
- While journalists perceived the police-recorded crime statistics to be reliable, they expressed concerns about the reliability of the BCS.

The Delphi Study offers a different perspective on this. Respondents to the study made the following observations:

- the distorting of the crime statistics by the media, where it occurs is not the result of deliberate actions, but rather the consequence of a lack of understanding of the statistics;
- evidence has suggested that where it has been possible to give media representatives pre-release support to help them understand the data, there has been some success in improving the accuracy of the information presented;
- while there may always be some desire by certain elements of the media to present a story rather than a more balanced and informed view of crime, there is potential to improve some of the accuracy of the information presented through further education of the media; and
- equally, if the media is to present the information to the public in an informative manner, it is important that they have confidence in the statistical data as they are presented to them.

These points are highlighted in the comments from Delphi participants shown below.

#### **Delphi participants**

“[The] media are not an objective educational institution. We are focussed on circulation and ratings and shock/horror will do nicely thank you. We don’t believe your figures anyway.”

“Media reports deal mainly with the headline issues as presented. Consequently there is fault on both sides – the media do not understand just what the data represents and then tend to attack those who have to explain where the information has been misinterpreted.”

“[...]we have to release to all at the same time and the media don’t have time to get a more in-depth understanding of the issues before trying to meet their news deadlines.”

### **7.2.3 Lack of trust in presentation of crime statistics**

Lack of trust in the presentation of crime statistics is a potential barrier to their use by the public. Research by MORI and documented in the Statistics Commission report *Official Statistics: Perceptions and Trust*<sup>40</sup> on trust in Government statistics in general suggests that there is an overall lack of confidence in official statistics, not just in those relating to crime. This is largely due to their use in assessing Government performance and the role of government departments in creating them.

#### **Delphi participant**

“The issue is that on the one hand; we are encouraged to believe that statistics are a neutral; objective tool; yet they are blatantly used for political purposes in a partisan manner. Statistics were never an objective tool and if we acknowledged this and advertised it more; we might become more aware of their limitations and therefore how they are misused”

An Office for National Statistics report on public confidence in British statistics<sup>41</sup> suggested that public confidence in official statistics in general is determined by a variety of factors. These factors include the individual’s personal characteristics, and the political context in which the statistics are presented.

<sup>40</sup> Report No 24 – *Official Statistics: Perceptions and Trust* (Incorporating: *Trust in Official Statistics*: MORI report on behalf of the Statistics Commission, Statistics Commission

<sup>41</sup> *Public Confidence in British Official Statistics*, United Kingdom Office for National Statistics, Maryanne Kelly, Feb 2005

However, this lack of trust needs to be seen in the context of the fact that there has been a considerable decline in public trust in many government institutions over recent decades<sup>42</sup>. It should be noted that general concerns are less related to the quality of the data that are produced than the way in which they are presented. For instance, this report has already considered the role of the media in shaping opinions. In addition, although the public are aware of crime statistics, they are more in touch with friends and relations' perceptions and local anecdotal 'evidence'. Thus, faced with conflicts between these and the published statistics, they tend to lose trust in the statistics.

### 7.2.4 The public's ability to interpret crime statistics

The majority of respondents in the Delphi study strongly agreed that confidence in official statistics was affected because surveys and police-recorded crime figures are not well understood by the general public.

This is particularly emphasised by politicians using these sources to demonstrate conflicting arguments, as is illustrated by the Labour Party Manifesto which quoted that "Overall crime is down by 30 per cent on 1997 ... violent crime down by 26 per cent.", in March 2005. However, in February 2005, the Conservative Party Manifesto stated, "Overall crime is up by 16 per cent. Violent Crime is up by over 80 per cent." Both of these quotes accurately reflect their data source, but the Labour Party referred to the BCS, whilst the Conservative party referred to recorded crime statistics<sup>43</sup>.

### Confusion between the BCS and recorded crime statistics

Public accessibility and the relationship between the BCS and police-recorded crime figures has consistently been identified as an important factor. The figures from the BCS and recorded crime statistics are published quarterly on the same day. The divergence between the two provides valuable information on trends in public reporting and police recording but is generally thought to have implications on public confidence in crime statistics, as the public does not differentiate between the two.

<sup>42</sup> Cabinet Office 2004, Duffy et al 2003, Ryan 2000

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck/quote.jsp?id=42>

#### **Delphi participant**

“Different sources of data are essential for proper verifiable analysis, however, if their presentation is not spot on they will confuse all but the expert user.”

“A more consistent and simplistic approach would increase public confidence in stats. At the moment politicians mix and match BSC stats with recorded crime stats – backing whichever supports their case at the time.”

“Unfortunately even those who should know better are confused about difference, so there is little hope for getting the message across to the general public. Politicians don’t help by playing the sources off against each other to score points. Educating opinion formers has to be the first step”

It is clearly necessary to address the complexity and multiplicity of the data provided to the public if there are to be improvements in public confidence in statistics. However, the fact that there will always be a need to manipulate the data in some form to prepare them for presentation means those accusations of interference will always be possible. This is reflected in the comment from one of the Delphi participants, shown below.

#### **Delphi participant**

“It is the use of the statistics – by politicians and the press – that undermine crime statistics. This will remain whoever produces the data. Crime data (be it recorded or survey) can never be wholly objective. It HAS to be interpreted, which will inevitably lead to accusations of interference.”

### **Limited public awareness of the NCRS**

In the Delphi study participants were asked whether they felt that the introduction of the NCRS had led to greater public confidence in the reliability of police-recorded crime statistics. Whilst some felt that it has resulted in the highest level of data integrity that there has ever been, two-thirds of those who responded said they felt that the NCRS had not led to greater public confidence. Some of the related comments from the Delphi study are shown below.

### Delphi participants

“Few understand what the NCRS is about and merely see it as an excuse for not providing trend data.”

“I’d be amazed if the public even knew what NCRS stood for!”

“The introduction of the NCRS should lead in the long term to improved public confidence in the figures, the decline in confidence in the short term is partly due to unfair reporting of figures affected by the new standard.”

### Public interpretation of trends

Concern was expressed by some of the experts at the seminar that there is a danger of people getting too much data and misinterpreting them or using them to reach different conclusions. For example, police force interpretation of changes in statistics may be different to public ones. For instance, an increase in the number of summary offences can prove to a Police Inspector that a cause of local insecurity is being tackled, but might be seen by the public as representing an increase in crime and hence be a cause for concern. This issue is particularly important in light of the recent ‘Reassurance’ strategy<sup>44</sup> and move to ‘neighbourhood policing’.

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.reassurancepolicing.co.uk/faq.asp>



# 8 Potential solutions

During the Review a number of issues and challenges have been identified. In this section we consider a range of potential solutions before going on to make recommendations:

- using alternative data to provide additional insight into 'hidden' crime
- regulating statistics;
- secondary use and exploitation of crime statistics
- focusing on standard analysis at a local level; and
- developing global measures of crime.

## 8.1 Using alternative data to provide additional insight into 'hidden' crime

### 8.1.1 Hidden crime

As part of its concerns with definition and representativeness, criminological research has been concerned with various hidden crimes, and exclusions from the official count of crime. Such phenomena have been subject to much research in their own right as substantive objects of enquiry. Areas of concern have included:

- anti-social behaviour (including vandalism and graffiti);
- domestic violence and abuse;
- white-collar crime and private citizens' fraudulent activity (tax evasion, etc.);
- organised crime, trafficking and money-laundering;
- cyber-crime (including fraud, pornography); and
- corporate crime and harm (pollution, injuries at work, etc.)

Many of these issues have only recently been considered as 'crime' and others still are not. These changes reflect shifts in moral and political concerns. Statistics are collected by the police and as part of the BCS for some of these issues and may also be collected as a by-product of the *regulatory activities* of a range of responsible statutory organisations. Information may be available internally to organisations affected by these issues but there is no clear legal obligation for these data to be disclosed or published.

## Defining crime

Over time there have been numerous changes in definitions of crimes and societal views on what is acceptable and how it is changing. Additionally, people may also be starting to report acts of anti-social behaviour that in the past they may not have reported because they were seen as relatively trivial. Citizens and corporate bodies (companies, hospitals, schools, etc.) decide whether to report crimes to the police and in instances such as theft or fraud by staff, there may be reasons why organisations choose not to report these, for example, because of the impact on the image of the organisation or because of commercial confidence. The media has also played a role in influencing the heinousness of different crimes.

### Delphi participants

“...hidden crime is by nature hidden, largely unidentifiable and therefore unrecordable”

“Broadly speaking; non-personalised crime and ‘non-victim’ crimes are, by their very nature, more likely to be ‘hidden’.”

## Crime innovation

The speed of change in technology means that hidden crime is likely to remain an area of rapid change, for example, the impact on the public of burglary and car crime being replaced by that of internet-based crime. However, not all of the new ‘scams’ are even clearly criminalised yet, with people being parted from their money from the other side of the world in ways that would not have been conceived of only a few years ago. Many of these incidents may not be reported to the police at all, and as they are newer crimes are not asked about within the BCS and other victimisation surveys. With some of these newer crimes there are issues around who is the actual victim, for example, with cyber crime and some types of fraud against which the individual is indemnified by a financial institution. In the long run, there is a danger that costs of crime will be passed on to the consumer, with little consequence to the provider.

## 8.1.2 Data on hidden crime collected by the public sector

### Data not included in published statistics

Crime statistics are not comprehensive because they exclude some sources of statistics. For example, data from the British Transport Police, the Ministry of Defence Police and the Civil Nuclear Police are not currently reflected in national statistics. The British Transport Police cover seven force areas across England, Scotland and Wales, and in 2004/05 the number of notifiable offences was 81,776. The fact that these figures are excluded means that the crimes remain hidden and the lack of clarity to the public that this is the case results in an underestimation of total crime.

## Other methods of collecting data

Criminological research has investigated alternative methods of collecting data on the occurrence of hidden crime. Crime victimisation surveys are now widely accepted. Other methods of data collection being experimented within policing practice include: environmental audits and observations (systematic social observation); and qualitative data (the signal crimes approach).

The extent to which it is possible to fully measure hidden crime is questionable. Should it be an aim to even try to count every hidden crime, rather than concentrate on those that are most significant or feasible to collect? The consideration of such questions can perhaps be most productively applied in relation to specific hidden crime issues rather than hidden crime per se.

## Fraud

A Government interdepartmental review of fraud (which commenced in October 2005) involving both the public and private sector has considered some of these questions. It has also highlighted that at a national level, there are a number of Government Departments with a data collection, enforcement and investigative role in relation to fraud such as: the Department of Work and Pensions (in relation to benefit fraud) and the Department of Health. The National Health Service has developed and successfully implemented a fraud strategy which may be used as a model for the development of National Fraud Strategy.

Further details about the Fraud Review Team are contained in Case Study 3 which can be found in Appendix 4.

The sharing of data between public sector agencies on crime may assist in building up a more detailed picture of crime and this is being considered in relation to fraud by the Fraud Review Team. However, it should also be noted that a Cabinet Committee has recently been established to develop a public sector strategy for data-sharing.

### 8.1.3 Data on hidden crime collected by the private sector

Case study 3 examined public accessibility to crime-related data held by the commercial sector for the purposes of measuring total crime. More detail can be found in Appendix 4 but some of the findings from this are detailed below:

- Detailed data relating to commercial crime and fraud are collected and held at an organisation level by individual companies. Aggregated data drawn from company data are collected at the UK national level by trade associations and some local data are collected by local business crime reduction partnerships and held on a national database.

- There are differing levels of public accessibility to these data. Much of the commercial data that are publicly accessible is aggregated data for the respective industries and sectors and is made available at a national level through trade associations. The case for greater public accessibility to commercial data on crime needs to be tested against: the needs of the target recipient (public sector agencies, the general public, and/or both); whether this is wider or deeper access; and what uses will be made of the data if there is greater access to them.
- Greater public access to commercial data on crime is likely to derive from a convergence of business need and the establishment of crime (or a crime type perpetrated) against business as a public policy priority, for e.g. as exemplified by the way that fraud is currently being examined through the inter-departmental review of fraud.

Observations by Delphi respondents on the nature, extent and accessibility of crime data held by the private sector are examined below. They reflect in part, some of the issues identified in the case study findings:

- The corporate world has increasingly sought to build up its own information base on criminal activities and potential threats. This includes an extremely wide range of organisations drawn from many different sectors of UK business. What these organisations have in common is a need to have 'real time' information to help understand key threats to their businesses and to be able to ensure appropriate measures are in place to mitigate against such threats.
- In response to such needs, large firms now have in place complex systems and processes to capture and analyse information collected from their own operations. For example, in the banking sector this might include data capture on: actual/potential security breaches; monitoring of existing threats; recent criminal use of technology/internet; money laundering; and fraud.
- Likewise, branded consumer goods manufacturers will have significant sources of information on criminal behaviour linked to the production of counterfeit goods.
- Many of these companies operate across borders and are able to pool intelligence and share information across countries, which governments can often find more challenging. In a world where the lines between the public and private domains are increasingly blurred, it has been increasingly recognised by law enforcement agencies and key stakeholders with an interest in crime reduction that there is far greater need for sharing data and intelligence on criminal activity with companies and other organisations operating outside of public domains.

- Recent work commissioned by the Home Office (unpublished) and undertaken by Matrix identified the specific need to share both quantitative and qualitative data if a true picture of the nature and scale of organised crime is to be fully understood. If this is to happen, organisations will need to both understand and value how the information they can provide will be used by law enforcement and in turn what information they have shared back with them to help meet their specific business information requirements.

### 8.1.4 Developing new statistics on ‘hidden crime’

Both policy makers and media are interested in creating a picture of total crime, although it is unclear whether the public are.

Reasons for questioning the desirability of attempting to count all types of hidden crime are:

- definitional – defining what acts constitute crime (see 8.1.1);
- political – to what extent should the state seek to know about phenomena that occur in the private sphere;
- economic – gathering data has a cost; and
- pragmatic – the speed of technological and social change and therefore the speed of crime innovation means that data collection procedures need to as quickly adapted and/or devised to capture this.

#### Delphi participants

“[...] whether something is cost-effective depends on the specific proposal. [...] Alternative sources of information are important (eg APACS for fraud) [...]”

“I would like to see some research into the validity of data from other organisations eg Womens Aid. In some cases it may be useful however I suspect that in most it will be of very poor quality.”

“The information is already collected and stored, but not analysed. I would suggest because the effort and attention stays on the priority crime areas.”

### Policy implications of addressing hidden crime

While it is beyond the scope of this Review to examine the political desirability or otherwise of measuring certain hidden phenomena, it was recognised that any recommendation around attempting to improve the measurement of hidden crime would also need to be cognisant of the policy implications of any such recommendation. There is a danger that greater recording of “hidden crime” means

that it is seen as a growing problem and a disproportionate level of resources get directed towards it. As such, greater levels of recording of hidden crime can create as much confusion as it resolves. Key to this is how the data are used and interpreted.

## 8.2 Regulating the use of statistics

### 8.2.1 Need for regulation

Given that public confidence in statistics is such an issue, the introduction of some form of regulation may help to improve perceptions that the statistics can be trusted. It was suggested in the Delphi survey that a clear set of standards is required to address the collection, analysis and dissemination of crime-related statistics, ensuring that the public can feel confident in the approaches taken.

#### **Delphi participant**

“There should be an INDEPENDENT and SOLE collator of data that can be trusted by all potential users.”

Regulation may also help to improve transparency. The number of different sources of crime-related statistics is confusing for the public. Having a single organisation which is solely responsible for the statistics could help the public to understand that these sources, though different, are not entirely at odds with each other, and can be used to complement each other. This was the intention behind bringing together the BCS and recorded crime in a single publication. However, since then a multitude of different data sets have appeared in a variety of forms, both from the Home Office and elsewhere.

### 8.2.2 Dangers of regulation

Against this is the concern that too much regulation prevents or creates a disincentive towards the exploration of new and innovative uses of the data. Additionally, it may inhibit the volume of statistical information that is available to users and could make people feel that information is being concealed in this way. Equally, concern was also expressed that regulation would prevent the statistics being challenged and disregarded, thereby sanctioning statistics which are no more reliable than they currently are.

Given that the media are the main source of much of the public information on crime-related statistics it may be that regulation is of limited use. In particular, it was suggested that people will always use statistics for their own ends regardless of regulation, implying resources may be better directed to improved education and interpretation. An example of these views from Delphi participants are shown below.

#### Delphi participants

“Oversight by an external body may be too remote to provide the local structures needed to ensure quality. [...] Use of the published statistics is not controllable in a free society, but the Statistics Commission could highlight bad practice.”

“As most crime is reported to the police, it will be nigh on impossible to remove them from the recording/reporting process. As such, 100 per cent independence cannot be achieved. However, using Government/ONS statisticians within each police area would certainly help.”

### 8.2.3 Alternatives to regulation

Within the Delphi study a number of respondents suggested that there are sufficient codes and protocols which relate to National Statistics, and as such more needs to be done to publicise these existing checks rather than create new ones. Additionally, data currently tend to be presented in isolation, which increases the risk of them being used for wider purposes.

#### Delphi participant

“There should be a way to increase the ONS ‘branding’, i.e. perceived independence, of the production of the stats. I can attest to the independence, and it is frustrating not to be seen as such. It is surely less efficient to set up a second team of people who are sufficiently expert in these stats?”

### 8.2.4 Conclusion

If we consider the different purposes that the public have that they wish crime statistics to help them fulfil current crime statistics are generally not fit for purpose. Key reasons underpinning this conclusion are:

- confusion over the presentation of statistics, particularly of the two key crime statistics: the BCS and recorded crime statistics;
- the lack of granularity of BCS statistics to report at a sufficiently local level; and
- the dependency of recorded crime statistics on public reporting coupled with changing counting rules and collection processes.

## 8.3 Secondary use of crime statistics

This review has identified some significant changes occurring in the use of crime statistics:

- the use of crime statistics for public-sector performance management
- the interest of the general public in having information on their personal crime risk
- greater public interest in the conditions of crime and safety in society and in people's own communities.

Unlike the past, none of these needs can be met easily or effectively by simply releasing figures. Now, and in the future, meeting many of these needs will require:

- secondary analysis, often through applying specialised analytic skills and technologies (e.g. in statistical analysis, geodemographics, or GIS )
- data linkage, to other public data sets (especially Census data) and relevant local information, in order to facilitate contextualisation and analysis, including interpolation and extrapolation of (crime) data
- output flexibility, for data to be available and accessible so as to be capable of being linked to other data and locales, especially via geographic linkage (facilities that are highly developed in the UK).

This review has found that public crime data are, or are close to being, capable of supporting these requirements. Equally, the range of skills, expertise, techniques and technologies available to meet the needs for secondary analysis of crime data have developed substantially over the past decades, drawing both on advances in scientific and academic knowledge, and in practical and commercial experience developed in other sectors amongst a range of non-governmental providers, including academia, and the commercial market, social research and informatics sectors. This experience suggests that there is great potential for further secondary use and exploitation of crime statistics to meet evolving governance and public needs.

Nevertheless some obstacles tend to stand in the way of the greater exploitation of crime data:

- *Data control* – partly due to tradition, and partly to their 'legal' characteristics, crime data are treated by the agencies that control them with a high degree of confidentiality
- *Data protection* – again perhaps because of their nature and origins, data controllers may be especially concerned about legal and moral issues around data protection and access

- *Absence of in-house expertise* – as the demands grow data-controllers frequently do not have sufficient in-house either the skills or capacities to meet these burgeoning needs, nor the mission or purpose to provide such secondary analytic services, either for their own purpose or for the communities they serve.

If anything, the ‘data explosion’ and greater public salience of crime statistics have made matters worse. For example, academic research in the UK has generated a substantial body of published scientific work making use of a linkage between the BCS and the UK Census<sup>45</sup>. Yet while it was possible for researchers to perform these operations on the BCS surveys 1982-1992 themselves, either on data sets supplied directly by the Home Office, or those deposited in the UK Data Archive, such facilities are no longer accessible and the Home Office has been unable to overcome what they see as ONS regulations which prohibit the availability of such data sets.

Similarly, the Home Office (as statutory data controller) has developed no clear policy either on scientific secondary use or commercial exploitation. Despite the Audit Commission recently commending analytic approaches to address evolving local community safety needs<sup>46</sup>, the data used in such analyses – especially to develop neighbourhood profiles from extrapolated BCS data – are either not publicly-available (as with the BCS) or have been used in conjunction with proprietary geo-demographic products, where there is no clear Intellectual Property or exploitation policy in place.

In sum, while there are burgeoning needs for ‘secondary use’ of crime statistics, and considerable expertise and interest amongst the academic and commercial ‘analytic industries’, there seems to be no clear policy or public interest articulation on the part of the data-controllers, primarily the Home Office, regarding the potential for exploiting crime statistics.

## 8.4 Focus on standard analysis at a local level

There was a strong consensus within the Delphi study, that a standard set of analyses about local crime published by the police would be the best way to address local needs for crime statistics. However, although a standard set would be desirable, there are numerous obstacles in the way of this becoming a reality. It was suggested

<sup>45</sup> See, *inter alia*, Tseloni, A. (2006). ‘Multi-level modelling of the number of property crimes: household and area effects’. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series A*, 169, 205-233. Tseloni, A., D.R. Osborn, A. Trickett and K. Pease (2002). Modelling property crime using the British Crime Survey: what have we learnt? *British Journal of Criminology*, 42, 109-128. Hope, T. (2004). Varieties of Community Safety – Private Security And Crime Victimization In Risk Society. Rome, Italy: ISTAT (<http://www.istat.it/istat/eventi/perunasocieta/relazioni.htm>)

<sup>46</sup> Audit Commission (2006). *Neighbourhood Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour: making places safer through improved local working*.

that even commonality of systems would not necessarily make this viable, as local interpretation of data still varies widely. Furthermore, it is important to remember that police-recorded crime data only tell us about crimes recorded by the police; therefore such data are only useful in terms of analysing 'known' crime at the local level.

Whilst the level of aggregation is a problem for the user who wants very local statistics, there are plans for record-level police crime data to be held centrally. This will facilitate many more opportunities for analysis and presentation. Additionally, Local Policing Summaries may address some of the difficulties with obtaining sufficient local level data. A standardised approach is least resource intensive but fails to recognise the diversity of the local experience. This may indicate a case for having a standard set of analyses which would be published by all forces, plus some supplementary analyses that are driven by local needs. Unfortunately the caveats (as a result of data quality and data protection, etc) that surround this data could mean that providing too much information to the public could be confusing, and lead to them making inappropriate comparisons and drawing incorrect conclusions. Thus, although data relating to crime are useful to the public, this needs to come with sufficient context to make it helpful.

## 8.5 'Global' measures of crime

Total crime is an oxymoron – the amount of 'crime' to be measured is unfathomable, crime statistics are always limited by the capacity of the law to define crime (eg anti-social behaviour) and the police and other law enforcement agencies to detect it occurring (in this, they are always greatly dependent on what the public is willing to report or confess to). While this point is now orthodox within the criminal justice system and academia it is only imperfectly understood by the general public.

A total measure of crime based on crimes reported to the police will be subject to issues of debate as to whether changes in the measure are the result of changes in crime levels or changes in public behaviour, as the propensity to report crime changes over time.

### Coherence

The European Statistical System (ESS) defines coherence as "the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods but which refer to the same phenomenon are similar". In the present review, issues arise concerning:

- the coherence between the BCS and the Recorded Crime Statistics, given their respective methodologies and conditions of collection (Hope, 2005), and the coherence of producing a total index of crime, made up of separate offence categories, given different variations of seriousness, frequency and cost.

- Similarly, efforts to derive reliable cost and value estimates of crime, have also been hampered by problems of coherence and commensurability. In particular, there is no simple or satisfactory equation between the cost of crime and the value of crime (or the value of crime forgone). Many of the difficulties of producing economic measures of crime stem from the substantial externality costs generated by crime and their public-good qualities. These are often considered as moral costs to society at large (e.g. the moral cost of impunity), and are inherently difficult to estimate.

### Possible measurements of total crime

Two suggested possibilities for a measure of 'total crime' are shown below:

- **A weighted index:** One alternative often discussed is the concept of a weighted measure of crime, whereby the seriousness of a crime is taken into account and the data are weighted accordingly. Whilst this may make the level of 'total crime' more reflective of the damage done, it presents credibility issues. This approach can potentially lack transparency, and there is a danger that it causes further damage to public confidence in statistics. As such, it is important that there is a wide consensus about the appropriate weights that are used.
- **An economic measure:** One option, which has been explored by the Home Office, is to derive a composite measure of crime from the growing body of research into the economic costs of crime.<sup>47</sup> Economic measures which embrace the cost of crimes to the exchequer and to the national economy as well as welfare/well-being costs to victims,<sup>48 49</sup> could, in principal, provide a very relevant measure for monitoring trends in the burden of crime on society and the economy. Average costs of crime by crime type could provide weights for combining different types of crimes based on their resource impact. Alternatively, aggregate costs of crime indices could be used to derive measures of the burden of crime and how this varies geographically or temporally. However, any estimates of this sort will have the same credibility risks as any weighted index.

<sup>47</sup> Dubourg, R. Hamed, J. Thorns, J. (2005) *The economic and social costs of crime against individuals and households 2003/04* Home Office On-Line Report 30/05

<sup>48</sup> Dolan, P. Loomes, G. Peasgood, T. Tsuchiya, A. (2005) *Estimating the Intangible Victim Cost of Violent Crime*. *British Journal of Criminology*, 45, 958-976.

<sup>49</sup> Some interesting research has been initiated into developing measures of the impact on crime on the well-being of victims and how these might be valued, as part of an ESRC funded seminar series "Crime, Insecurity and Well Being" based at the Centre for Well-being in Public Policy at the University of Sheffield.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately global measures of crime serve no clear purpose and can potentially confuse the public as much as they can help. Any measure that aims to be more reflective of real life complications is also likely to be based on too much manipulation to make it transparent. Additionally, it will still remain subject to concerns about whether it is being too greatly influenced by external factors, or too unstable. However, whilst no such measure is apparent at the moment, this should be reviewed in the longer term, with the potential to develop a robust QALY, based on the principle of the cost of crime.

# 9 Findings and recommendations

The ongoing development of crime statistics is hampered by a confusion of *means* (technical discussions about crime statistics that focus on their interpretation and reliability) and *ends* (more conceptual discussions about the purposes different user groups use crime statistics to achieve).

## 9.1 Purposes for which crime statistics are used

Government and local crime reduction and criminal justice delivery organisations need to introduce greater clarity into their thinking and communication.

### Recommendation 1

The Home Office should introduce more clarity between policy, performance and communication as different and distinct purposes when it uses crime statistics internally and presents the outputs of this work publicly. This is achievable in the short-term.

### Recommendation 2

When presenting crime statistics publicly, as a performance measure, the Home Office should make a clearer distinction between the limitations of the crime statistics and the limitations of the performance management systems. This is achievable in the short-term.

## 9.2 Means

### 9.2.1 Recorded crime statistics

The introduction of NCRS is an important step. Our recommendations focus on the way in which recorded crime statistics are used and presented.

### Recommendation 3

The Home Office should address the use and presentation of violent crime statistics so that the definition of violent crime makes a clear distinction between crimes that involve violence in the commonly accepted use of the term and other incidents that are currently grouped as violence. This is achievable in the medium-term.

#### Recommendation 4

The Home Office should provide additional support to the public to help the public better understand the improvements to recorded crime statistics brought about by the introduction of the NCRS, but at the same time, make clear the fundamental limitations and volatility of all recorded crime statistics, based as they are on legal definitions and counting rules that change over time. This is a task that will also need to involve local crime reduction and criminal agencies, following the Home Office lead. This is achievable in the short to medium-term.

#### Recommendation 5

The Home Office should present the recorded crime statistics separately from the BCS as a measure of criminal justice performance, particularly with respect to the more serious and better reported crimes, and workload rather than an overall measure of crime. This is achievable in the short term.

### 9.2.2 BCS

All surveys are susceptible to methodological constraints which are a product of issues such as sampling strategies, interview techniques, data management and analytical processes. As the BCS is now so important, more policy weight and scrutiny in relation to performance measurement is being attached to it. It is crucial that the reliability of BCS is subject to public scrutiny. For instance, during this Review it has been suggested that:

- **Design options:** relatively little is known about the consequences for the BCS of different options for questionnaire design and administration. For instance, different forms of interviewing (face-to-face, Computer Aided Personal Interviewing (CAPI), Computer Aided Self-Interviewing (CASI) and Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI)) can lead to very different measurements, particularly of (domestic) violence;
- **Cluster methodology:** although it is a well established methodology used in all major government surveys some felt that clustering could be a particularly important issue which might be leading to erroneous findings. At present, there is relatively little information in the public domain about the scale of error that may result from the way that the BCS cluster sampling design interacts with the 'natural' clustering and concentration of crime victimisation in residential areas;

- **Data accessibility:** BCS data sets are released to the UK Data Archive but are restricted for academic use. While it has been possible in the past to link the BCS to other data sets, especially the UK Census, this facility is no longer available for public use. Data protection rules are cited as the reason why this facility is not possible. Work is ongoing within the Home Office to provide stronger links between the BCS and the Neighbourhood Statistics Service (NeSS), and to allow data to be matched to other sources without individuals being identified.

#### Recommendation 6

The Home Office should publish its ongoing programme of work to ensure that the BCS is as robust as possible. This should include a planned programme of work and the results of such work. This can be commenced in the short-term.

The distinction between policy customers and research providers of the BCS is important to the perceived and actual independence of the BCS. Policy customers and research providers within the Home Office need to have a close and ongoing dialogue, but nevertheless, their roles need to be clearly defined and separated to ensure that the analysis of the BCS is not put under undue pressure.

#### Recommendation 7

The Home Office should consider organisational arrangements that might strengthen the distinction between policy customers and research providers. These might range from a prominent independent steering group to oversee the methodological development of the BCS to placing the BCS outside the Home Office. This is achievable in the medium to long-term.

### 9.2.3 Global measure

Total crime is an oxymoron – the amount of ‘crime’ to be measured is unfathomable, crime statistics are always limited by the capacity of the law to define crime (eg anti-social behaviour) and the police and other law enforcement agencies to detect it occurring (in this, they are always greatly dependent on what the public is willing to report or confess to). While this point is now orthodox within the criminal justice system and academia it is only imperfectly understood by the general public.

A total measure of crime based on crimes reported to the police will be subject to issues of debate as to whether changes in the measure are the result of changes in crime levels or changes in public behaviour, as the propensity to report crime changes over time.

**Recommendation 8**

The Home Office should consider further the long-term development of weighted indices of crime, including a 'cost of crime' measure potentially using Quality of Life Indicators (for instance, the QALY). This is achievable in the long-term.

# 10 Appendix 1: Methodology

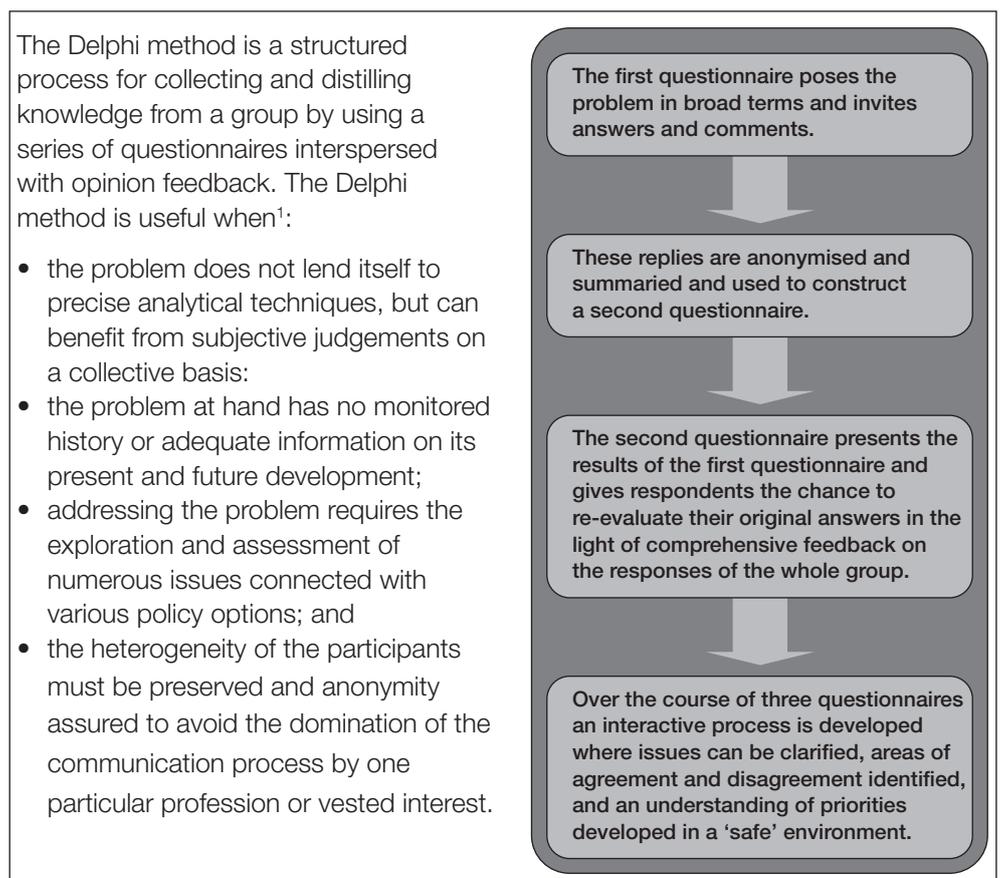
## 10.1 Expert seminar

On 7th October 2005, the Statistics Commission, supported by Matrix Research and Consultancy Ltd and Keele University, convened an expert seminar to clarify areas and lines of enquiry for the Review of Crime Statistics. A series of short presentations by experts, based on the key issues set out in the tender, were followed by an opportunity for those present to discuss the topics arising from the presentations. A list of participants can be found in Appendix 7. Notes from the seminar have been published on the Matrix website <http://www.matrixrcl.co.uk/reports.htm>.

## 10.2 Delphi questionnaire survey

In order to achieve the consensus of a wide range of individuals, a Delphi method was employed. Details of the Delphi approach are shown in Figure 3, below.

**Figure 3: Delphi approach**<sup>50</sup>



<sup>50</sup> Adler, Michael, and Erio Ziglio (eds.) (1996). *Gazing into the Oracle: The Delphi Method and its Application to Social Policy and Public Health*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

The Delphi study allowed an engagement with a wide range of users of statistics to help establish:

- the needs of users;
- the adequacy of current data,
- the use made of them in decision making, and
- any relevant methodological issues.

In particular, the Delphi was important in defining measures of 'quality' (fitness for purpose). Questions around this issue were framed in the context of the six quality dimensions of the European Statistical System (ESS):

- relevance;
- accuracy;
- timeliness;
- accessibility;
- comparability; and
- coherence.

A list of organisations where individuals were invited to participate in the Delphi can be found in Appendix 8. Almost 400 people were invited to participate in total. The response rates to the Delphi survey were ninety six, fifty eight and thirty eight individuals in rounds one, two and three, respectively. The tables below give an impression of the makeup of the respondents. Responses from individuals (including government, police and other organisations) directly concerned with events in Scotland or Northern Ireland are counted under the headings 'Scotland' or 'Northern Ireland', respectively. Individuals directly connected to the Police Service in England and Wales or the UK as a whole are counted under the heading 'Police'. Any individuals who work in a department of the Home Office are counted under 'Home Office'. Individuals who are employed by universities are counted under 'Academics'. All other respondents, from businesses and other contacted organisations, are counted under 'Others'.

**Round 1** – Figure 4, below, describes the makeup of respondents to the first round of the Delphi survey.

**Figure 4: makeup of respondents to Delphi survey round one**

7	7%	Scotland
8	8%	Northern Ireland
33	34%	Police
13	14%	Home Office
14	15%	Academics and researchers
21	22%	Others
<b>96</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>

**Round 2** – Figure 5, below, describes the makeup of respondents to the second round of the Delphi survey.

**Figure 5: makeup of respondents to Delphi survey round two**

6	10%	Scotland
4	7%	Northern Ireland
19	33%	Police
6	10%	Home Office
10	17%	Academics and researchers
13	22%	Others
<b>58</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>

**Round 3** – Figure 6, below, describes the makeup of respondents to the second round of the Delphi survey.

**Figure 6: makeup of respondents to Delphi survey round two**

3	8%	Scotland
2	5%	Northern Ireland
14	37%	Police
6	16%	Home Office
6	16%	Academics
7	18%	Others
<b>38</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>

The Delphi questionnaires themselves were made up of dropdown boxes for the recording of ordinal responses, tick boxes for the recording of nominal responses, and free text fields for the recording of comments. The analysis of the Delphi responses consisted of two main streams. Firstly, graphs were constructed from counts of the ordinal and nominal responses to provide a picture of opinion and identify any consensus areas. Secondly, the comments were filtered and analysed for themes or strong arguments using a framework method.

### 10.3 Literature review

A number of summary papers were received during the review: a paper on ethnicity and diversity in crime statistics from Professor Fitzgerald; a paper on the methodological issues involved in international comparisons from Professor Karstedt; and an overview paper on criminological research into the production, meaning and use of crime statistics by Professor Hope. The review also referred to published overviews of knowledge about crime statistics<sup>51</sup>. It was concluded that while criminological knowledge is essential in providing an understanding of the social context and production of crime statistics (a key role of the Academic College in this review), there has been a negligible amount of research directly concerning the public's understanding and use of crime statistics to warrant a systematic review.

### 10.4 Case studies

As part of the narrow and deep phase four case studies were undertaken. Detailed information from these can be found in the appendices that follow.

<sup>51</sup> Maguire, M. (2002) 'Crime statistics: the 'data explosion' and its implications' in M. Maguire et al. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology: 3rd Edition*. Oxford: OUP; Hope, T. (2005). 'What do crime statistics tell us?'. In C. Hale, K. Hayward, A. Wahidin and E. Wincup (Eds.), *Criminology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

# 1 1 Appendix 2: The presentation of National Crime Statistics

## Introduction

Following a key recommendation of the 'Simmons Report'<sup>52</sup>, we have seen the annual series of Criminal Statistics (which reported only police-recorded crime data) replaced by an annual 'snapshot' of crime (supplemented by quarterly bulletins) as the principal Home Office report on the state of crime. This now draws on both recorded crime and BCS data. At the same time, both statistical series have undergone major revisions: for recorded crime, counting rule changes and the adoption of the NCRS<sup>53</sup>; for the BCS, a three- to fourfold increase in annual sample size, with continuous surveying. Together, these constitute a major, significant change in the official, national accounting of crime in England and Wales. The purpose of the NCRS is to promote greater consistency between police forces in the recording of crime and to take a more victim-oriented approach to crime recording; the purpose of the revised BCS is to provide an independent measure of crime victimisation and public concern about crime and disorder to support national crime policy-making, to audit police-recorded crime and (since 2002) the performance of police forces.

Phase 1 of the review uncovered evidence that the existence of these two sources of official crime statistics is neither well understood nor, in consequence, trusted by the public. While the BCS now has a high public profile, there is generally a lack of understanding regarding the purposes and effects of the NCRS which tends to fuel mistrust. While the public understand that recorded crimes are statistics produced by the police, there is ambiguity as to the status of the BCS, as a national or specifically Home Office statistic. A number of concerns have emerged about the data and the manner in which they have been presented: concerns about the quality respectively of recorded crime and BCS data; presentational and political issues concerning the release and interpretations placed on these data; the absence of a means of independent audit, or of secondary use, of these data sources; the closeness of executive (political) and technical considerations in their production and presentation; and, not least, public confusion, misunderstanding and lack of confidence resulting from the different statistical sources and political context.

The case study involved discussions with policy users representing the following areas of Home Office policy:

- The Performance Board;
- The Crime Reduction Directorate; and
- Violent Crime

<sup>52</sup> Home Office (2000). *Review of Crime Statistics: a discussion document*. London: Home Office.

<sup>53</sup> In April, 2002

Discussions also took place, separately, with senior representatives of Home Office Research, Development and Statistics (RDS) responsible for overseeing the production and presentation of the official crime statistics; and with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO).

## **Overview**

As this case study has developed, a key distinction has emerged between the use of crime statistics within the Home Office, primarily as a management tool applied to local services for which it has responsibility (the police, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships), and the use of crime statistics outside the Home Office as means by which government tells others, including HM Treasury and the public, about its own performance.

The development of how the Home Office perceives crime statistics over the last 20 years or so needs to be viewed in the context of the changing role of the Home Office. From an organisation that concerned itself principally with the administration of policy on policing, prisons, national security and immigration, over the last twenty years or so, the Home Office has widened its remit to include a group of inter-related issues:

- the prevention of crime and the reduction of crime rates.
- the importance of local, multi-agency approaches to reducing crime.
- 'Community' and the behaviours and outcomes that are harmful to communities, including a range of sub-criminal activities such as anti-social behaviour.

As a result of this, the Home Office has adopted and developed new approaches to crime management in the community, many of which have necessitated a far stronger regional and local focus (including the establishment of a regional-level of administration within the network of Government Offices).

Over the same period, the Home Office, as with all spending departments, has had to account within government for its expenditure. Since the introduction by HM Treasury in 1998 of the cycle of Comprehensive Spending Reviews, accounting for the expenditure of Government departments has been tied increasingly within the budgetary process to accounting for performance (known as 'delivery'), including the establishment of a range of performance indicators, tied to a set of published Public Service Agreements (PSAs).

The way that the Home Office uses statistics currently needs to be seen, in part, as a response to this changing and widening remit.

## Crime statistics as a management tool within the Home Office

Crime statistics have been seen increasingly as tools to assist in the management of Home Office activities and as an important part of the auditing of local services, for example, by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary. In recent years, the statistics on recorded crime, hitherto the chief crime index, have been supplemented by data from other statistical sources, notably the BCS.

The Home Office uses crime statistics in three main ways:

- Monitoring performance against PSAs: Like all government departments, the Home Office has a set of Public Service Agreements (PSAs) that it is committed to meeting. Within the Home Office a Performance Board reviews regularly an extensive range of crime statistics that it uses to monitor its progress towards meeting PSAs. Both PSA1 (crime reduction) and PSA2 (safety) utilise both sources of crime statistics, with the latter (PSA2) relying primarily on the BCS since its aims concern perceptual issues (e.g. the fear of crime).
- Monitoring performance of regional and local delivery bodies: Crime statistics are also used by the Home Office to monitor the performance of police forces and local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. For instance, the Crime Reduction Directorate holds quarterly ‘bi-laterals’ with Government Offices at which CDRP performance is reviewed using crime statistics. BCS data have been used to help establish performance frameworks, comparators, etc. but of necessity recorded crime statistics have been the principle means of assessing local service performance (given the huge cost of a greater granularity of the BCS at local service level). Against this, it was recognised that the NCRS had greatly improved the reliability of recorded crime data and the comparability between local service units.
- Formulating policy: Analysis of crime statistics are used by policy teams within the Home Office to inform and promote new policies. In this context statistics might be used in a variety of ways ranging from the identification of issues that require a policy response through to detailed analysis of crime data to understand the precise nature of a problem.

Administrators thought that their capacity to use crime statistics for policy and management had been helped by the out-posting and embedding of analytic staff within policy directorates, who were now able to provide customised analyses and interpretations of the data. Home Office policy makers reported that the BCS often provides the principal crime statistics that they rely upon. Reasons cited included its ability (now that its ample size has been increased) to provide a limited set of statistics down to police-force level and the contextual information that allow the causes and effects of crime to be studied. An example of this latter advantage that was provided to us related to violent crime and the possibility the BCS affords to explore the relationship between alcohol and violence.

## Limitations of crime statistics as a management tool

The key limitations with current crime statistics that policy makers identified to us were:

- reliance on recorded crime statistics when monitoring the performance of CDRPs: the BCS not providing the necessary level of granularity (on the grounds of cost), but limitations of recorded crime statistics being recognised. Examples were given of disputes with local CDRPs regarding availability and funding of local crime victimisation surveys;
- practical and administrative difficulties in data sharing amongst local partners; and
- difficulty of measuring performance in anti-social behaviour and fear reduction: recognition of the difficulties of using recorded crime statistics to measure anti-social behaviour; a preference for using perceptual/attitudinal data at national level (from the BCS); absence of such data at local level.

## Production of crime statistics

Responsibility for the production and analysis of crime statistics rests with the Research, Development and Statistics (RDS) capability within the Home Office. In recent years, RDS has been restructured and groups of RDS staff have been 'embedded' within policy teams, leaving a residual, central group. Central RDS retains responsibility for the production of crime statistics and commissions, manages and publishes the various statistical series produced by the Home Office. However, the embedded elements of RDS are now responsible for providing specific analysis to specific policy teams.

From our discussions we remain unclear about the relationship between the production and use of crime statistics. We sought to ascertain whether the production of crime statistics was led by the needs of policy makers or whether policy makers worked with the crime statistics that they were provided with.

## The implementation of the NCRS

The NCRS reform was designed to improve the consistency of recorded crime statistics and government integrity. Police use it for performance management. It was not designed to improve public confidence in crime statistics per se nor was communicating with the public a primary aim of the reform. However, more consistency and robust data should improve public accountability.

It also took longer for NCRS to reach its full effect than anticipated. The Policing Standards Unit commissioned the Audit Commission to do a two-year audit of crime statistics. It found that in some areas (such as Met police) there was no audit trail in place and that the recording of lower level offending was a problem. Nevertheless,

there are questions for the role of auditing in the future. In the future detailed audit process will be more 'risk based' and all 43 police areas will not be covered to the same depth.

The NCRS incorporated significant changes to the Counting Rules introduced in 1998. Together these have produced an 'artefactual' increase in the recorded crime series, anticipated by the Home Office. Yet this remains a difficult message to convey to the public.

Home Office RDS emphasised the importance of maintaining a consistent application of the NCRS reporting rules. This has been greatly helped by the Crime Registrar system, consisting of a National Crime Registrar who liaises between the RDS and the individual Force Crime Registrars, who has operational independence from police forces and provides central national support.

## The BCS

The BCS has evolved over time reflecting a range of useful purposes for the Home Office. The main changes in use have been:

- 1981 – introduced primarily to inform policy-making, contributing over the years to new insights and new ways of dealing with crime – e.g. prevention of domestic violence, crime prevention and repeat victimisation prevention;
- From 1997, in line with the present government's policies, providing more focus on performance management in government and national level; and
- 2000(2001) BCS redesigned to facilitate more focus on performance management, particularly of police forces.

The key changes to the BCS from 2000 (2001) onwards have been:

- Increase in sample size
- Change in sampling design
- Increase in frequency of reporting (facilitated by continuous surveying)
- Calibration weighting (regional distribution by age, sex at individual and household level).

## Development of Crime Statistics

### Supplementary statistical sources

The Home Office appears to have an ongoing programme to develop crime statistics. This is evidenced by the recent commissioning of periodic supplemental surveys (e.g. Offending, crime and justice survey, Commercial victimisation survey, Citizenship survey) and specific projects commissioned the Home Office to

investigate the feasibility of making use of other sources of statistics to gain a better understanding of crime (eg study on use of A&E data as a measure of violent crime). However, at this stage we are not clear as to whether this developmental work is driven by any consistent strategy or is an ad hoc response to circumstances. There is an ongoing discussion internally about performance information at a more local level. A large sample size is essential for robustness but it also increases the cost. There also needs to be balance on what information is needed by policy makers and what is robust information.

### **Methodological development**

Despite the importance now attached to the BCS as the primary national source of important data on crime, its basic methodology has remained substantially unchanged since its inception 25 years ago. The Home Office RDS reported that it has never found its consultative arrangements with external experts to be useful or effective and abandoned its BCS User Group.. (In contrast, on the basis of our experience, we feel that the RDS has made very little use of, nor canvassed sufficiently widely, to engage independent academic advice on methodological and substantive issues concerning the BCS). Apparently, the BCS has an internal Steering Group that formalises the policy group involvement and has external research representation. RDS believe that the Steering Group should be more involved in the future planning of the BCS, will achieve a balance in the substantive questions asked, and 'formalise' policy makers' involvement.

Since its inception the BCS has been commissioned by the Home Office on commercial contract. The contract is re-tendered every three years and cost about £4.3 million per year. Modifications to the survey can be made in April and sometimes in October. Not only has its cost increased substantially but like all social surveys, the BCS encounters a range of methodological issues that can affect its reliability and validity substantially. Partly as a consequence of these arrangements, much of the methodological work on the BCS has been carried out within a competitive commercial framework, with an associated lack of the public transparency. RDS does not release the results of technical reports and methodological reviews into the public domain, preferring to focus upon substantive outputs.

Discussion of the methodological solutions arrived at (including the re-design applied in 2001) have not been sufficiently transparent either to afford independent public scrutiny or to have taken advantage of the methodological expertise available in the wider expert community. Thus, it is not clear whether necessary steps have been taken to ensure that public interests in the reliability of the BCS and value-for-money issues are properly balanced.

## Secondary use of crime statistics

Neither Recorded Crime figures nor BCS data (in 'raw' form) are readily accessible to the public or to those who might want to provide services based on the data (academic research, commercial research and information products) at a sufficient level of granularity to provide a basis for secondary use and exploitation. Most research analysis of the BCS has been carried out by the Home Office in-house, or under contract. The RDS recognised that there are problems with academic and commercial use of BCS, and they would like to increase its usage outside the Home Office. However, the data are not archived quickly enough and some variable identifiers are removed, which, they claim, is a consequence of National Statistics policies on confidentiality and disclosure. Access to and use of BCS data for academic research purposes (via the Data Archive) is circumscribed, nor is it possible for those outside government to link recorded crime figures or BCS data to other public data sets, including the UK Census. Restrictions seem to have worsened in recent years, albeit these appear to be due to interpretation of data protection requirements and not Home Office policy.

Despite many demonstrations of potential applications, and widespread interest from potential secondary data users, the Home Office does not have clear and consistent policies regarding commercial, academic and non-governmental use and exploitation of crime statistics. While there appears to be a presumption that government should be the primary user of crime statistics, little attention is paid to secondary use and exploitation, with an assumption that this should be administered and regulated officially.

## Crime statistics as a means of public accountability

Historically, crime statistics had been regarded as Official Statistics collated by the Home Office for public accounting purposes, presented to Parliament as an official series of Criminal Statistics. Following a key recommendation of the Simmons Report we have seen the annual series of Criminal Statistics (which reported only police-recorded crime data) replaced by an annual 'snapshot' of crime (supplemented by quarterly bulletins). This now draws on both recorded crime and BCS data. We were unclear about the Home Office's strategy for publishing national crime statistics and using them as a means of public accountability.

There is no official written strategy governing communications with the public about crime statistics; rather, the idea is to draw on different sources to describe the statistics to the public, guided by Home Office policy needs. There is also tension between summary statistics and detailed statistics and it is difficult to set the balance. The Home Office Press Office have a key, and influential, role in the way in which the Home Office presents reports on crime statistics to the public.

RDS officials admitted that they found it difficult to get one sense of what the public is interested in. Consistency between messages builds trust and it was felt that public users tended to take a pick and mix approach to crime statistics in selecting what they needed. The RDS preference was for topic-based reviews rather than comprehensive source-based reports. For example, a review about fraud was recently published that uses data sources such as BCS, OCJS and other industry sources. The Home Office has discussed with representatives of national newspapers the use of statistics but the outcomes were inconclusive. Quarterly updates provide a simple summary but always need expert and careful interpretation. Ministers have wanted to present the results, or to be at press conferences when they are released. It has been commented that this was not always helpful in communicating results accurately or carefully.

Officials felt that it may not always be useful for the public to be presented with reports via the media. A crime statistics website has been established, for example, to provide statistical information. However, it was recognised that for the general public media reports provide the principal source of information. At a local level, the Home Office has a strategy for communicating key messages about crime to local communities and crime statistics are used as part of this process. The Home Office view was that local agencies should remain free to present crime statistical information to their local audiences.

# 12 Appendix 3: The relationship between statistical indicators and Public Reassurance and Confidence

## Introduction

In addition to the messages that crime statistics send to users, they have the potential to play a key role both in ensuring the best use of its services and resources, and in gauging public satisfaction. This case study explores the various issues and applications entailed in making better use of local and regional crime statistics and statistical sources in relation to the delivery of reassurance and confidence.

While systems of data collection on crime and offending have long been established within the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), like all police services it needs to assess and develop data and statistical systems to assess hitherto intangible, hidden or unmeasured data that are nevertheless important indicators of the public's needs for reassurance, customer satisfaction and confidence-building. The MPS is a key user and provider of recorded crime data and as such has a very high public profile. This case study has examined the use of local information by the MPS and worked with them to examine how police forces can and do use data.

This case study will explore the views of the MPS regarding the scope for the application of current recorded crime statistics, and the desirability of additional sources – e.g. crime victimisation surveys, observational data, incidents – to meet present demands, both from the public, and from the point of view of compliance with PPAF in the field of reassurance and confidence-building.

This case study also addresses, some of the concerns around the conceptualisation and measurement of public insecurity (the 'fear of crime'), highlighted within the shallow and wide phase, focusing on the public demand side to assess the need for these kinds of data.

The findings in the study have been drawn from interviews with a number of Metropolitan Police Service representatives, and from documents they provided.

This case study seeks to answer the following broad questions:

- What local data are produced and how are they used?
- How are local data presented to the public?
- What fear-of-crime data are produced and how can they be used?
- Are there any ways the MPS can improve the way they share data with the public?
- How do the MPS manage public attitudes and fears of crime?

## **Key findings from this case study**

- The level at which local data are provided is too aggregated. Although NCRS has helped, the public need to see lower levels of granularity for it to have real meaning for them.
- Provision of high-level data can make the public feel more scared than is reasonable, distorting the picture for the general public because there is a lack of context. For example, whilst kidnappings may happen, it is rare that this is a random act, but more likely to be the result of gang rivalry etc, and would be unlikely to affect the general public.
- All crime clusters and this is not reflected in the data that come from Home Office figures, even when looking at data at a ward level. More consideration should be given towards the potential to encourage greater detail in the level of reporting. Ward-level data may still make people feel more concerned about crime than is appropriate because it does not show the full picture. Street-level data may be one solution, although this could discourage people from reporting crimes, and could of course suffer from considerably more variability and lack of clarity given movement of crime.

## **What local data are produced and how are they used?**

Data are produced at various different levels of aggregation, and in different contexts there can be a usefulness associated with each level of aggregation. Traditionally the Home Office considers the high level picture and only provides counts. Whilst there may be scope to change this with NMIS the real information currently can get lost inside this high level picture.

## **Level of data provision**

The Home Office does not publicise reports on crime mix and force level data. It would be useful to have a standardised level but there is a lot of variation because of the differing levels of recording that take place.

This information is something that can help people understand the drivers of crime and can therefore help the police allocate resources. At the same time, it can also help inform the public so that they can understand what is really happening. Provision of high-level data can make the public feel more scared than is reasonable, distorting the picture. For example, whilst kidnappings may happen, it is rare that this is a random act, but more likely to be the result of gang rivalry etc, and would be unlikely to affect the general public.

Different monthly/annual crime statistics are confusing as they are difficult for people to relate to their own experiences. The public are naturally suspicious of national statistics, and the crime statistics produced by the police for the police are very

complicated. It was felt that whilst the NCRS is a step in the right direction but that it doesn't go far enough, and the message is not clear enough to the public. They are generally not aware of what has changed, and the impact.

There is a significant issue regarding the way in which crime types are grouped together, and the way in which these high level numbers presented can give an incomplete picture. Whilst NCRS has adjusted some of this, it still does not enable better use of context. There are also issues around errors that are made in terms of classifications in recording that need to be considered releasing and data. For instance, 40 per cent of threats to kill were found to be incorrectly classified, sending out a more serious message than was appropriate.

### Data for trends

The Home Office was considered to not be creative enough, and it was also suggested that it dissecting too much at different times. This means that the public do not get sufficient consistency, as the variety in dissection leads to instability and too much noise. Ultimately, this means the public (and the media) cannot see the real picture. One solution may be for changes should be made every three years for example, rather than ongoing. This would enable people to at least draw some useful, clearer comparisons. Whilst there is a need for change in terms of giving a true picture this can compromise the transparency of the picture presented to the public and as such the lack of continuity is potentially destructive.

At the present the BCS cannot deliver enough answers to some of the questions they need to answer because of the size of the BCS and the volume of work that is carried out. The status of the BCS warrants a larger team than it currently has, as the BCS is responsible for driving policy and understanding drivers of crime.

### Police force use of data

Unfortunately, with the quarterly rolling data that are provided by the BCS there is a limited amount of analysis that it is possible to carry out, and it is difficult to link this to what is actually done on a daily basis. For example, they may want to examine the impact of changes sooner etc (detection, reducing ASBOs). One solution that the MPS has tried is the public attitudes survey it runs. This mirrors the BCS at different levels and although the method is designed to match the BCS as closely as possible the results deviate substantially. This survey costs £204K per year but the MPS has been struggling to get anything the boroughs can use. This will be worse still for smaller police forces which do not have the same capacity to run similar surveys.

## **How are local data presented to the public?**

There is a clear story that the BCS can tell but because it is at such a high level members of the public do not understand it, and cannot relate to the picture it tells. If there was an open dialogue about crime it might prompt more people to try to understand it better. At present, greater use of police gets lost among all the other information and people fail to see the impact of changes that have been made.

## **The London example**

Research carried on behalf of the MPS suggested that two thirds of Londoners still do not feel well informed about police in their area. Although this was an improvement on the previous year, this remains a cause for concern, as does the fact that just over half do not feel well informed about police activities in London as a whole.

The MPS considers effective information provision a key role in improving police-public relations, managing expectations and increasing confidence and satisfaction with the police. Information is directly linked to the Citizen Focus agenda and provides benefits to the MPS in terms of increasing public confidence.

## **Safer Neighbourhoods**

Safer Neighbourhoods is about local policing; police and partners working with the public, to identify and tackle issues of concern in your neighbourhood. It is known that the Safer Neighbourhoods initiative is beginning to improve the levels of understanding among the public. However there is no uniformity in the levels of information communicated at the Safer Neighbourhoods meetings, and this lack of consistency which is apparent across London, is likely to be even greater when considered at a national level.

Whilst the Safer Neighbourhood meetings are starting to have an impact, these tend to be attended by the more educated middle classes, and there remain groups of people that are ill-informed about crime. Effective information provision plays an important role in improving police-public relations, managing expectations and increasing confidence and satisfaction with the police. Information is directly linked to the Citizen Focus agenda and provides benefits to the MPS in terms of increasing public confidence.

The MPS advised the Safer Neighbourhood teams that:

- People want sustained and regular provision of information, directly from the police. This needs the statistics to be provided not in isolation but with the context to make them intelligible, and not misleading.

- People's desire for information focuses on what crime and disorder exists in the local area. They want feedback and follow-up information on initiatives and outcomes of police action directed to these local problems.
- Whilst it is useful for people to have a concept of what is happening in general, data relating to crime carry most impact and relevance if provided at a local / ward level. Where possible the MPS has aimed to provide information at a street by street basis. This gives people a real sense of the relative danger they are in so they can make a more accurate assessment of their own level of risk of crime, enabling them to understand how what is happening in London can help them to make sense of what is happening in their own street.

### Presenting the context

Going forward the focus needs to be on sharing information that people can use as much as the raw statistics. This means that people need to see the contextual information as well as the raw data, but there are inevitable resource issues that accompany this. Not many people can marry the stats into messages that are helpful and it is hard for police forces to allocate resources to this.

It can be difficult for local police forces providing local data to ensure they are not taken out of context. As such, it is used to create a sensational story rather than reporting the reality. The MPS does not have the control over what gets reported and the local press were thought to not understand the information well enough to convey it more widely. Although the MPS has 32 press officers who do a lot of work, they themselves do not always have enough understanding of the statistics to communicate this to the media. This is likely to be true of other police forces, where they may have a smaller number of press officers.

Currently the MPS sends the standard report to the Home Office but they would hope to influence how the Home Office tells the story of the data, as they can provide the contextual information to make it more real to the public. Although valuable, the impact of employing this on a wider basis across all police force data could be difficult to manage (particularly if the same story is interpreted differently across different forces), but would help the media present the information more accurately, and help the public to make informed decisions in relation to crime.

## Considerations for producing local data

There is a conflict in terms of presentation between public versus strategic needs/uses. It is rare to get big shifts in the data, only in rare cases such as mobile phone robberies have there been significant leaps, and at times this data can be worth sharing, but frequently reports are issued for the sake of it. In producing the local data consideration needs to be given to:

- Need for specifically tactical
- What people can really use
- Understanding the victim – being more obvious about the messages. In turn, this will also help with fear of crime messages

## West Yorkshire Police

West Yorkshire Police have attempted to inform the public more about crime by the use of a website that is accessible to all which gives maps showing crime at a street level. Reflecting some of the discussions seen elsewhere in this report, some crimes are not covered in order to prevent individuals becoming identifiable. This website (<http://www.beatcrime.info>) has been well received, although the costs of marketing have constituted a large proportion of the spend on the website.

## Fear of crime

Whilst fear of crime is an Home Office strapline it is always something that will be important to the police. However, it was questioned whether just because fear of crime is an Home Office strapline, does it need to be a police one. Although fear of crime is considered to be important, there are limits on the extent to which it can, and should drive decisions about for police forces. The BCS survey data are not always as helpful as they might be. For instance, people say that they are fairly worried but there is no indication of what that really meant by “fairly”.

## Usefulness of fear of crime measures

The research suggested that the fear of crime information can be unnecessary and confusing, and the messages that get conveyed do not seem to help in alleviating people's fears. For example, information about drug dealing and ASBOs are helpful but are not available for public information. It was also suggested that there is too much focus on trying to develop a perfect a measure and that there needs to be a stop gap measure until they have a better solution, rather than failing to do anything because they want to get it right first time.

## Relationship between level of crime data and fear of crime

Headlines that have appeared such as “there is a gun on every corner” are over dramatic and sensational and contribute to fear about crime. In most cases relating to crime, all the issues happen in clusters, and the general public is not in the danger that it may perceive from these high level figures. There will always be some places that are better and worse than others, and many cases these are not always the places people would expect. For instance, in London, some of the worst places include the West End and St James’ ward (which includes Piccadilly Circus). This is because this is where large groups of people accumulate – the density effect. This issue relating to fear of crime could be better managed if the Home Office was to present more cause and effect information.

A potential solution is for the Government to start pushing for street by street analysis as until then there will never be sufficient resources for police forces to carry this kind of analysis out widely. Although they know which streets are the most dangerous there is a lack of desire to name those streets by the MPS. This conflict means that fear of crime remains disproportionate to the level and danger of crime faced by individuals.

In the main police forces do not understand why low-level data are so valuable. They are used to being less transparent in the UK than the US (where it is possible to get street-level data in many states), and struggle to adjust to the idea of the police being more open with data. There is a feeling that more transparency means losing some of their autonomy, as they have to justify everything that is done a lot more. There is also an issue of confidentiality as if people know that when they report a crime that it will appear as a dot on a map then they may be more loathed to report the crime. In the US the policing is funded by the tax payer and therefore the culture is different in that they are used to be accountable. Following on from the Pattern report changes have been made in Northern Ireland which has enabled them to look at crime statistics differently to the mainland as they have had to reinvent themselves as something different.



# 13 Appendix 4: Additional sources for measuring total crime?: the financial sector

## Introduction

The last thirty years has seen a phenomenal growth in consumerism which has created new arenas in which crime occurs. Public knowledge of the level and nature of such crime is limited. Much of this information is collected by private sector organisations and is primarily for their own interests in directing their business, managing loss and assessing risk. In some sectors such as the insurance industry this is their business.

It has been proposed by respondents to the Delphi study that there may be substantial public benefits in making knowledge about so called hidden crime typified by commercial crime more publicly available.

This case study therefore examines the case for this information to be made more accessible to the public by reviewing the desirability, feasibility and cost of greater statistical information being made publicly available from private, financial and retailing sources.

Interviews and discussions were undertaken with individuals from: trade associations, business crime prevention organisations, commercial enterprises and regulatory bodies. This covered fraud and retail crime and addressed the following broad questions:

- What crime-related data are currently collected and held by the commercial sector?
- What is the quality and representativeness of these data?
- What data are currently publicly accessible?
- Is there a desire for greater public access?
- What are the change mechanisms for making data more publicly accessible?

It should be noted that this case study offers a limited sample of the nature and extent of crime-related data collected by the commercial and financial sector. The findings and conclusions therefore should be regarded as indicative rather than definitive.

In relation to fraud it should be noted that a Fraud Review Team was established in 2005 which reports to the Attorney General and Chief Secretary of the Treasury. This team has been reviewing the way that fraud is handled by various Government Departments as well as the commercial and financial sector and is due to report its findings in June 2006. Some of the initial key findings and recommendations from the Team are considered towards the end of this case study.

## Key findings

- Detailed data relating to commercial crime and fraud are collected and held at an organisation level by individual companies. Aggregated data drawn from company data are collected at the UK national level by trade associations and some local data are collected by local business crime reduction partnerships and held on a national database.
- There are differing levels of public accessibility to these data. Much of the commercial data that are publicly accessible are aggregated data for the respective industries and sectors and are made available at a national level through trade associations.
- The quality and representativeness of data that are currently accessible by the public is variable. It was not possible to make an assessment of the quality of the data held privately by individual companies due to commercial confidentiality. However, what appears to be evident is that the quality and range of this data will vary across sectors and companies.
- The collection, handling and use of data by APACS on credit card, cheque and debit card fraud provides an 'industry standard' within the private sector in terms quality, range and representativeness. It offers an example of the way in which it is possible for a specific industry sector to organise the handling and public accessibility of data to benefit itself and address individual company concerns about commercial confidentiality
- The case for greater public accessibility to commercial data on crime needs to be tested against: the needs of the target recipient (public sector agencies, the general public, and/or both); whether this is wider or deeper access; and what uses will be made of the data if there is greater access to them.
- Greater public access to commercial data on crime is likely to derive from a convergence of business need and the establishment of crime against business as a public policy priority, for e.g. as exemplified by the way that fraud is currently being examined through the inter-departmental review of fraud.

## What crime-related data are currently collected and held by the commercial sector?

As suggested in the introduction the collection, analysis and availability of crime-related data in the commercial sector are organised principally around business need and is private data. The majority of crime-related data that are collected by commercial bodies are held by individual companies. In the main, only a portion of this private data is made publicly available and generally as aggregated data for different commercial sectors through their respective trade bodies such as the Association of British Insurers (ABI) for the insurance industry.

Table 1 below offers a snapshot summary of the types of data held by the commercial bodies based on interviews and discussions held with representatives from the organisations and their assessments of the data held.

The most sophisticated and organised of the data sets considered within this case study is that which is compiled and controlled by the Association for Payment Clearing Services APACS in relation to fraud. Its scope and use most closely mirrors that of official crime statistics such as police-recorded data.

This is featured here as an illustration of what is possible within the commercial sector and offers an industry standard for the sector. It should be noted, however, that it also illustrates the importance of such activity being driven by and serving business need.

#### **APACS – Fraud data**

##### *Nature and extent*

APACS is the only body in the world that is able to call on data from all card schemes such as Visa, Maestro, Mastercard, American Express, Diners Club. As a comparison Carte Banque in France has access only to data from Visa and Mastercard. APACS receives data on every identified fraudulent transaction undertaken with a credit, debit or charge card in the UK.

There are on average 4.5 million fraudulent transactions per annum carried out using 600,000 cards in the UK. This is now reducing with the advent of chip and pin system.

##### *Compliance*

The card issuers who are all members of APACS are obliged by the terms of their contract to report all fraudulent card transactions to the card schemes. The schemes in their turn have been instructed by the card issuers to compile full data and make them available to APACS. This is downloaded to APACS from the schemes on a monthly basis.

##### *Quality and consistency*

The data are cleansed by automatic processors that have been put in place by the APACS management information team and through some manual reviews. However there was a suggestion made by a respondent that there may be double counting in the APACS data.

Data controller	Sector	Data available					Public accessibility			
		Type	Frequency of collection	Quality and range	Representativeness	Current level of public accessibility	Frequency of release of current data	Feasibility of widening access to data	Costs of widening public access	
Individual companies	All sectors	This will vary by sector and company	This is not known not but will be dependent on business need	This is not known not but will be dependent on business need	High quality and wide ranging Data are also cleansed by automatic processors and through some manual reviews	30 companies supply which covers 80 per cent of the insurance company market	Little or no current public access	Monthly	Commercial confidentiality suggests that this is unlikely to change	
Trade Associations	APACS Banking and finance payment industry	Detailed information on incidents of credit card, debit card and cheque card fraud	Monthly returns from APACS members	High quality and wide ranging Data are also cleansed by automatic processors and through some manual reviews	Data are made available by all card schemes and card issuers	Quarterly data available by subscription Some data are available through policy work	All 6 police forces in Scotland have a crime extract for their geographical areas	Monthly	The same crime data were offered to the 43 police forces in England and Wales two years ago following the supply by the forces of the post code data for their geographic areas of responsibility	
	ABI Property Insurance	Property claims	Quarterly	Good quality	30 companies supply which covers 80 per cent of the insurance company market	Quarterly	As policy papers are produced			
	ABI Fraud	Survey data	Annual	Reasonably high quality	35 responses (out of a membership of over 400) were received for the last survey	Survey results	Annual			

Figure 7: Crime-related data held by commercial bodies

Figure 7: Crime-related data held by commercial bodies (continued)

Data controller	Sector	Data available				Public accessibility			
		Type	Frequency of collection	Quality and range	Representativeness	Current level of public accessibility	Frequency of release of current data	Feasibility of widening access to data	Costs of widening public access
Public private sector partnership between British Retail Consortium and the Home Office	Action Against Business Crime Retail	Survey of British Retail Consortium members	Annual		40 per cent response rate from members	Survey results	Annual		
	Action Against Business Crime Principally retail, focussed on businesses in town centres and shopping areas	National Business Information System Incidents and intelligence on suspected individuals and associates currently held for some business crime partnerships as separate databases through a central system	As reported by individuals stores and businesses to local business crime reduction partnerships		Dependent on reports from members of local business crime reduction partnerships 180 partnerships				

#### *Use of data*

The primary use of the data is to prevent fraud rather than track down the perpetrator. APACS will work with retailers who are the subject of fraud to improve systems and advise on training for retail staff. They will also conduct control analyses of similar stores within the same area to identify if fraud has migrated.

Data can be analysed in a variety of ways for e.g. by location and type of fraud. All major retailers receive a monthly print-out of data relevant to their stores. Each retailer has an identifier and the data are collected in such a way that the mode of transaction and type of fraud can be identified.

For e.g. if a fraudulent transaction took place at a Tesco store, it would be possible to identify: the postcode location of the store; whether it was a Tesco main store or a Tesco Express; whether the transaction took place with the card present or card not present; and whether the transaction took place online or by telephone.

#### *Availability of data*

There is currently quasi public access to these data. Systems are in place to deliver a crime extract on a monthly basis to all six Scottish Police forces. Arrangements could be put in place to make similar data available to the current 43 English and Welsh Police forces, should these forces make postcode data on their areas of geographical responsibility available to APACS. This offer was made the English and Welsh police forces and the Home Office two years ago, however such data still remain to be provided.

### **Contributing to a measure of total crime**

The current data that are publicly available is of limited use and is unlikely to contribute much to obtaining a measure of total crime, for the following reasons:

- the data are of uneven quality, range and comprehensiveness;
- The frequency of the release of data (e.g. monthly, quarterly and annually) is of insufficient regularity for it to be relied upon as a data set (of commercial crime) and is (arguably) of even less value as a subset of a 'total crime' data set when compared to the more rigorous data collection and dissemination cycles of official statistics;

However, on a test of fit for purpose for the commercial sector this current arrangement is probably adequate. Only if the business needs of the commercial sector changes and/or the public need for this private data becomes a significant public concern is there likely to be significant change.

### **What data are currently publicly accessible?**

As illustrated in Table 1, the majority of data that are publicly accessible are aggregated data in the form of survey findings such as those conducted on an annual basis by the British Retail Consortium and the Association of British Insurers (in relation to fraud) which offer annual trend data.

Other trade bodies have produced survey reports on crime against business such as the Federation of Small Businesses and the British Chambers of Commerce, however, these tend to be one off efforts aimed at highlighting the problem of crime against business rather than providing a data set that can be used to for e.g. track for trends over time.

### **Is there a desire for greater public access?**

Two questions that this case study brings to the fore are:

- how public is public in relation to the access to crime-related data?
- is greater access wider access by larger numbers of people to commercial crime-related data or deeper access to more detailed data?

### **How public is public?**

What has arisen in this case study is perhaps a distinction to be drawn between access to commercially held data by public bodies such as the Police for e.g. in the case of crime extract data from APACS and access by members of the public to largely non operational data such as annual survey data.

### **Wider or deeper access?**

Perhaps the simplest response to this is that greater public access means both. This then prompts questions raised by a number of respondents about:

- what use will public bodies (and Government) do with access to more detailed (operational) data?
- what use does the general public currently make of data that are available and what use would it make of further data?

In consideration of the first question, respondents were sceptical about the eagerness of the police to receive information about commercial crime. One respondent cited the example of reporting vehicle fraud to the police. The police will argue over which force the crime should be reported to: the jurisdiction of the force where the insurer is located; to the force where the accident took place; or to the force where the claimant is located. The respondent commented, '...forces will argue over it, they don't want it. Its not a priority for them, even organised crime is often not investigated'.

Examining the issue of public use of statistics around commercial crime, responses from the Delphi Study suggests that the public use crime statistics to:

- assess the performance of the authorities in tackling crime;
- understanding policy development by government;
- understanding the causes of crime, victimisation and offending;
- determining personal risk and susceptibility crime; and
- informing the public of criminal activity in their area

It is unclear how far existing public access to statistics on commercial crime is used in these ways and if there was wider access to such data if such public (desire) and needs would be served, even for e.g. if such access would provide a more accurate measure of 'total crime'.

Case study 4 examines the public use of crime statistics through the media. The results of this case study suggests that media reporting of crime statistics in relation to commercial crime is limited compared with that for violence, sex offences and anti-social behaviour. If the public take their cues about what types of crime are important from coverage in the media, crime against business is unlikely to be rated as a important.

### **What are the change mechanisms for making data more publicly accessible?**

Comments from respondents suggest that any significant change in making commercial data on crime more publicly accessible requires the satisfaction of two criteria. These are:

- meeting business need; and
- establishing crime against business as a public policy priority.

#### **Meeting business need**

Businesses are set up to make a profit and this involves risk. The primary use of crime-related data collected by companies is to assist them in taking action to minimise the risk posed by actual and potential crime. They have no interest in making this private data available to the public unless they contribute to minimising their risk.

There is an inevitable tension for businesses between this focus and that offered by some respondents to the Delphi study that there are substantial public benefits in making knowledge about commercial crime more publicly available.

While all respondents for this case study recognised that there are hugely increased opportunities to commit fraud and other crimes due to new technologies, ‘merely identifying the problem is not going to be welcomed by businesses’.

The provision of crime-related data by companies for the purposes of measuring total crime is on its own an insufficient incentive to companies.

Trade associations are the primary data controllers through which crime-related data collected within the commercial sector is made available to the public. However, their role in this is regulated by their members, the companies.

In addition, the companies themselves can choose whether or not to make any data available to their associations. For example the ABI only received 35 responses (out of approximately 400) from their member companies in response to their last fraud survey. There are few examples of reporting compliance across the commercial sector. The only one identified through this case study was for the fraud data reported to APACS on a monthly basis by all card issuers and card schemes.

### **Establishing crime against business as a public policy priority**

A number of respondents commented that there was a perception that crime against business was not regarded by Government as a public policy priority. They also suggested that there was a perception amongst the commercial sector that Government regarded crime against business as the responsibility of business.

As one respondent commented, ‘If asked to provide data by Government, business will ask what is the cost of this and the value of this.’ The respondent also suggested that if such data were made available there was ‘...a great suspicion that Government will say, you do something about it.’

Conversely one respondent suggested that while firms were unhappy with the perceived Government response to commercial crime when ‘Government says show me the data, the firms don’t report it.’

Section 4.2 of this report suggests that a number of drivers for public policy in relation to crime. These are:

- moral and political preference;
- relative heinousness; and
- the [nature] and extent of the state supervision and regulation of civil society and private life.

The extent to which crime against business measures up against these drivers and therefore its importance as a public policy priority is examined in Table 2 below. The comments and reflections are drawn from discussions with case study respondents.

**Figure 8: The importance of crime against businesses as a public policy priority**

Public policy driver for crime	Government	Public sector agencies	General public
Moral and political preference	The general public (electorate) have expressed concerns about violent crime and anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime. These concerns are therefore the concerns of Government	The police are more likely to be publicly criticised for failing to investigate violent crimes than they are a crime against business	The general (usually law abiding) public may be complicit in perpetrating crimes against business. For e.g. over-claiming on an insurance claim
Relative heinousness	Government's view of heinousness is shaped by that of the public.		The personal direct impact of crime against business is not largely felt, internalised or understood by the public.  There is a common prejudice that business crime is a victimless crime  The public is perhaps better able to appreciate the impact of criminal damage on local retail business that for example may have to close due to criminal damage than the impact of fraud on a large financial institution.
The nature and extent of the state supervision and regulation of civil society and private life	It is the responsibility of business to manage the risk from crime	Public sector agencies operationalise the regulation of civil society and private life on behalf of the state.  Agencies such as the police work to public service agreement targets.  The police do not have a target for business crime. Therefore business crime is not a priority.	

While the above assessment of the relative importance of crime against the commercial sector is one that currently prevails this could change.

As suggested earlier in the report at 4.2 ‘...what is legally proscribed and enforced continue to shift as statutory definitions become obsolete and new forms of harm (or wrong) emerge or increase in seriousness...’ Anti-social behaviour was cited as one such harm which had become more important because of public demand.

The issue of fraud as a crime against business is featured below. It provides an example of the way that the two criteria: meeting business need and establishing crime against business as a public policy priority can interplay to effect change.

## **Fraud**

### **Background**

The Government commissioned an interdepartmental review into the detection, investigation and prosecution of fraud in 2005. This began work in October of the same year. The review was tasked with addressing the following key questions:

- what is the scale of the problem?
- what is the appropriate role for Government in dealing with fraud?; and
- how could resources be spent to maximise value for money across the system.

The review is being overseen by the Attorney General and the Chief Secretary of the Treasury. It has consulted widely with stakeholders in the public and private sectors and will deliver its final report in June 2006.

### **Interim findings**

The following emerging findings which relate to measurement, data collection and data sharing in relation to fraud are drawn from the Interim Report produced by the Fraud Review Team in March 2006.

These are set against the case study questions detailed in the introduction.

#### **What crime-related data are currently collected and held by the commercial sector?**

#### **What is the quality and representativeness of this data?**

There is no official measure of the scale of fraud due to gaps in information about the nature and type of fraud. This is due to:

- the absence of a legal definition of fraud;
- the absence of a single place for reporting fraud; and

- inconsistent recording and counting of fraud by the various institutions to whom fraud is reported.

The Interim Report suggests that fraud can be categorised by type of victim as follows:

- Government (benefit, tax, grants);
- Business and organisations (credit cards, insurance, insider dealing, false accounting, funds diversion); and
- investors and individuals (advance fee, investment and share boiler house investments)

In relation to statistics on fraud perpetrated on commercial organisations there are estimates of corporate fraud by accountancy and business firms based on surveys of fraud experience in companies. Some companies routinely report their experience of fraud to trade organisations such as CIFAS<sup>54</sup>, APACS and the ABI. It should be noted that the insurance industry has recently established an Insurance Fraud Bureau which will have a remit to collect more detailed national data on insurance fraud. However, in relation to this routine reporting the report suggests that these are voluntary reporting obligations which the companies make to CIFAS and APACS. They do not encompass anything like the whole corporate sector and therefore do not provide an estimate of total corporate fraud.

In relation to the reporting of fraud as a crime, the report offers the following findings:

- the counting rules are complex and there are currently bureaucratic issues hindering crime reporting (e.g. if a stolen credit card is fraudulently used several times and in several police authorities this should be counted as one crime (the initial theft) and several crimes (every time it is used) in each police authority where a transaction has taken place (where the card was stolen or where it was first used);
- some police forces do not record all frauds reported to them by the public either because they know they do not have the resources to investigate them or because they consider them more appropriate for civil action, or the expertise is lacking to recognise the criminal fraudulent activity; and
- much fraud is either unreported or unknown to its victims: according to one estimate only 20 per cent of fraud is known to the authorities.

An ACPO commissioned piece of research is currently underway, delivered by Professor Michael Levi et al which aims to measure the totality of fraud and the cost of fraud to the economy and society.

<sup>54</sup> CIFAS is the UK consumer credit industry's fraud prevention service

### **What data are currently publicly accessible?**

The Interim Report concludes that compulsory reporting requirements are currently very limited.

All companies have to report frauds that are material to their financial position to their auditors and disclose them as an exceptional item in their accounts. Regulated financial services businesses must disclose significant frauds to the Financial Services Authority, however the report states:

- frauds do not have to be reported to the police (and many companies do not report even significant frauds because of fear of reputational damage);
- frauds do not have to be reported to shareholders in the accounts or anywhere else unless they are material;
- companies are not required to give an account to shareholders of the action that they take to prevent or mitigate fraud, although some do so voluntarily

### **Is there a desire for greater public access?**

A key finding from the Interim Report is clear that there is, ‘...no enthusiasm for compulsory reporting of individual frauds to the police from either companies or police, especially given the likely lack of response to them.’

However in terms of serving the public interest the report concludes that:

‘...there is an urgent need for better data on the scale, nature and extent of fraud. Only when there is such information available will it be possible to make sound judgements about the priority that fraud should have in national law enforcement priorities and to direct those resources into the most harmful aspects of fraud.’

This view is supported by the results of the consultation conducted by the review team with public and private stakeholders.

### **What are the change mechanisms for making data more publicly accessible?**

This will be addressed by the final report of the Fraud Review Team, however some of the measures being considered by the Review Team are:

- the development and implementation of a National Fraud Strategy;
- giving a single body the responsibility for overseeing the strategy and ensuring co-ordination between public and private sector bodies engaged in tackling fraud; and
- the establishment of a National Reporting Centre to improve the reporting and recording of fraud.



# 14 Appendix 5: The public use (including trust and understanding) of crime statistics through the mass media

The mass media are the most common channels through which the public access crime statistics. The way in which this information is conveyed to the public by the media is the focus of this case study.

The findings in the study have been drawn from interviews with: Home Office Communications Directorate, news media; pressure groups, quasi academic bodies and learned professional societies. They represent three key sectors who are primary users of crime statistics. As well as being users of statistics they also act as *information gatekeepers* and in some cases act as *commentators* on behalf of the public.

The media interviews included representation from national broadsheet, national tabloid (non red top) and regional newspapers. These were journalists who specialised in covering home affairs and crime.

An interview was also conducted with a representative from an academic professional society.

This case study seeks to answer the following broad questions:

- which crime statistics are presented by the media to the public?
- how are the crime statistics used and presented by the media to the public?
- how much trust is placed in the accuracy and reliability of crime statistics by the media?
- what is the role of the media in presenting crime statistics?
- how well do the public understand crime statistics?
- are there other ways in which crime statistics can be communicated to the public?

Some of the issues compiled below inevitably reflect themes within the rest of the report, however, they offer a more detailed exploration and understanding of them.

A specific section of this case study considers the use of crime statistics within the English regions and devolved parts of the United Kingdom exemplified by Wales.

## Key findings from this case study

*The media (in particular the press) present crime statistics as they do other news, in the context of serving a range of stakeholders/audiences including: their reading public, their editorial voice; their shareholders and their advertisers.*

- *There are a range of 'publics' which the different newspapers and broadcast media serve. They present information to these 'publics' in the way in which they expect their public to understand it and they provide the type of information which they understand to be most relevant to them. For e.g. national papers will report on national statistics, regional papers will report on regional statistics.*
- *Different parts of the media fulfil a range of roles (although not necessarily all within the same vehicle, e.g. one newspaper) at a national and regional level which spans: assessing the performance of authorities; informing policy development by government; understanding the causes of crime, victimisation and offending; determining personal risk and susceptibility to crime; informing the public of criminal activity in their area.*
- *The future provision of crime statistics to the public (publics) needs to be better targeted at the public and tested for 'relevance'. Relevance may include enabling the public (publics) to: hold government to account; holding local police (and other local agencies) to account; assess how safe are the places where they and close others live, work and play; assess how safe these places are to other places that they may have an affinity with and/or knowledge of.*
- *There may be missed opportunities to set national crime statistics in the context of regional and local crime statistics due to the way that national crime statistics are released to the media and in a way that better meets the interests and copy deadlines of the English regional press and media in devolved parts of the UK.*

## Which crime statistics which are presented by the media to the public?

### Main sources of crime statistics

As identified earlier in the report the following are currently the main sources of crime statistics available to the media and the public:

- Victimisation surveys
- Police-recorded data
- Statistics regarding offenders and offending
- Statistics measuring hidden crimes
- Statistics measuring fear of crime
- Statistics measuring the diversity of victims and offenders

### Non media respondents

The general impression of non media respondents was that the media primarily used police-recorded crime data rather than BCS data for the following reasons:

- police-recorded crime data showed that 'crime' was increasing even though the BCS showed that crime was going down;
- in Wales, police-recorded figures were used because it was broken down by police force area and because it allowed the media to compare the performance of Welsh police forces with English police forces – '...they like the stuff on police performance because Welsh Police [usually] come out better than English forces'.
- the 'simplicity of a crime' as measured by the police-recorded figures was 'compatible with media values'.

One respondent commented that newspapers from the political right tended to use police-recorded data and those on the political left tended to use the BCS data.

It was suggested by one respondent that if the BCS showed an increase in 'crime' compared with police-recorded figures then the press would report this rather than the police figures.

### **Media respondents**

One respondent suggested that the order in which the sources of crime statistics have been listed (as above) represented the right hierarchy of usefulness. This respondent commented that they tended to use the BCS, because it 'will produce many more stories for us'.

In addition this respondent commented that the paper used statistics contained in one off studies in which figures and information were 'often more layered'.

Another media respondent reported that the paper used:

- quarterly and annual crime statistics;
- offender caseload management statistics; and
- criminal justice statistics such as the number of sentences and the population in custody

The respondent commented that the BCS figures played 'second fiddle' to the police-recorded crime statistics because the Survey figures were 'far harder to explain to the public' in addition, the public didn't understand the BCS.

More use would be made of BCS figures when different sections of this was available for e.g. where there was more detailed information on violent attacks or gun crime.

The respondent from the regional newspaper reported that the paper used police-recorded data and occasionally referred to the BCS.

## **How are crime statistics used and presented by the media to the public**

### **Understanding of crime statistics by the media**

The journalists (home affairs/crime correspondents) who were interviewed for this case study demonstrated a good understanding of crime statistics and the differences between various types of data.

This was confirmed by the non media respondents who made the following comments:

#### **Comments from respondents**

“They [home affairs, crime specialists] are knowing users – they will have a particular understanding about the figures. They have a pretty good idea about what the stats tell you.”

“They don’t [understand the statistics] apart from a small number of specialist crime correspondents.”

“Some redtops understand it but don’t reflect it’

#### **The interpretation of crime statistics by the media**

A national journalist commented that ‘we fillet things for ourselves’ and in the case of his paper they looked for statistics on violent crime, gun crime and sex offences. The respondent indicated that he spoke with organisations such as the Crime and Society Foundation for an interpretation of the statistics although often they provided a different interpretation to the one that he would take.

A regional news journalist commented that they would not seek comments from non-government sources in terms of ‘statistical safety’ of the crime statistics but might consult with for e.g. academics to ask about trends, for e.g. ‘what does this trend in violence show?’.

One journalist suggested that the ‘...sheer nature of news demands means that we end up relying on politicians for interpretations. There is room for a professional objective judgment on stats’ but it appears that statisticians are not wanting to get involved in the political debate.’

### **Comments of non media respondents**

The following are drawn from comments by non media respondents on their perceptions of the use made by journalists of crime statistics.

#### **Comments from respondents**

“Journalists have an ambivalent relationship with crime statistics. They place a huge amount of trust in them sometimes to make a political point.”

“Dramatic falls in British Crime Survey rates [the press] don’t believe that crime has fallen almost by half in a decade. There is a degree of mistrust, a mistrust in the political process.”

“Media are not a mechanism for conveying truth and wisdom.”

“They aren’t public bodies. The information they provide is to maximise sales or promote their [paper’s] agenda.”

“With some exception [the media] are looking for a story not analysis. Exceptions tend to be analyses by small numbers of specialists in broadsheets and one or two specialists on national broadcast. There are so few words. [The] whole of half hour news on ITN contains less words than a page of a broadsheet.”

### **Distortion and the representation of the typicality of crime**

Consideration is given elsewhere in the report to the distorting effect that both the media, government and authorities can have in their presentation of statistics to the public.

However, some additional consideration needs to be given to the role and need (in particular of the press) to cover crime as part of filling space.

As one non media respondent commented, ‘ Even if there are only half the number of cases of a particular type of incident [this year] than last year, it will not make any difference to reporting because of the need to fill up space. They won’t report half as much.’

### **How much trust is placed in the accuracy and reliability of official crime statistics by the media?**

The trust which is placed by the media in official crime statistics can perhaps be summed up by the comment from one journalist who recounted that on taking up his post as home affairs correspondent his editor told him ‘there are lies, damned lies and crime statistics.’

This perception of mistrust by the media of official crime statistics, which is reflected elsewhere in this report is however, only accurate in part and appears to be a more significant problem with the national press.

Amongst the journalists there was a mixed response in relation to the accuracy, reliability and therefore trust in the types of crime statistics available.

### **Police-recorded crime**

Both the national tabloid and regional news respondents perceived that the police-recorded figures were reliable and in the case of the former that other crime statistics were accurate and reliable. There were 'no worries' about the way in which these were compiled.

One journalist respondent commented that there was an openness by the Home Office about the changes arising from the National Crime Reporting Standard and the impact this may have on police-recorded crime figures. The attribution of increases in police figures resulting from the reporting changes was reported as such by this respondent for the first two years however he became more sceptical when continuing increases in subsequent years were still being attributed to the recording changes.

### **British Crime Survey**

There were concerns expressed about the reliability of the BCS both from the broadsheet and national tabloid respondents.

These concerns were:

- the size of the Survey – the sample size of just over 45,000 individuals was regarded as small;
- the representativeness of the sample – there was scepticism about whether or not individuals from high crime areas/deprived estates were included in the sample; and
- the continued divergence between police-recorded crime statistics and the Survey;

One respondent commented that he had become sceptical about the BCS during the last 18 months and that some figures within the survey 'stretched credulity'. He cited the example of domestic violence. According to the Survey, incidents had fallen from around 800,000 ten years ago to 400,000 now. This represented a 50 per cent reduction in domestic violence over the ten years which also accounted for a 25 per cent reduction in all violent crime over the same period. The volume was so large that he commented that 'one questions the headline figure.' The journalist tried to obtain an explanation from the Home Office and was informed by the Press Office that 'its just statistics...'.

## **Presentation of the statistics**

The view of a national journalist was that the 'statistics themselves are fine, they were repetitive but that there was 'clearly no attempt to mislead with the stats'. However, the briefing document that accompanied the statistics was regarded as 'more antagonistic than helpful'. This was considered to be the Home Office's favoured interpretation of the statistics. It was suggested that giving such an interpretation served only to 'wind up journalists' who were then inclined to go and write something else.

In addition it was suggested that at the briefing meeting held by the Home Office to present the information, the officials would be better off just 'giving the stats' and then asking the journalists what they wanted to talk about rather than to present the official interpretation of them.

This respondent further described the quarterly briefing meetings as 'futile', as both journalists and statisticians had become 'weary and wary' of each other.

One respondent commented that there was far less information available now in the 'merged documents' (which contain police-recorded data and BCS data) than before. In addition there appeared to be no explanation of trends and a criminological debate was absent from the figures.

The same respondent observed that the figures were now annotated to indicate statistical significance or non significance. This journalist attempted to discover what the asterisk meant but received no reply from the Home Office.

## **The timing of the release of crime statistics**

It was acknowledged by one media respondent that the Home Office had moved to fixed publication dates for the quarterly release of crime statistics to 'take the political heat out of the publication of the figures'. However, the statistics that were now being published on a quarterly basis were regarded by this respondent as highly selective. In addition other figures (such as those on street crime) were still being published outside of these fixed dates. The implication of this is that such inconsistencies in the release of statistics can only serve to fuel mistrust between Government and the media.

## **Comments of non media respondents**

There was general agreement that the technical quality of the statistics were high, i.e. they measured what they measured, however the issue was about the interpretation of the figures.

The following comments reflect the views of non media respondents to the accuracy and reliability of the crime statistics.

#### Comments from respondents

“Recorded crime figures is based on what’s recorded – not an accurate record of real trends in crime. Useful if you know that.”

“Victimisation surveys are more reliable. Have to be careful because they tend to be household surveys as opposed to the person on the street. [There is] a distorting effect. Business type crime gets excluded. Some categories of crime, domestic violence, sexual crime need to be taken with caution.”

“The commentary that is put with statistics has got better than it was 10 years ago.”

“The British Crime Survey is more accurate now than before because it’s a large sample.”

“The British Crime Survey doesn’t measure an awful lot – they measure what they measure.”

“Why have the British Crime Survey violence figures fallen while homicides have gone up? The BCS excludes a lot of violence.”

## What is the role of the media in presenting crime statistics?

The table below sets out the responses of interviewees in relation to the role of the media in using crime statistics:

**Figure 9: Responses of interviewees in relation to the role of the media in using crime statistics**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Comments from media respondents</b>	<b>Comments from non media respondents</b>
<i>Assess the performance of the authorities in tackling crime</i>	Yes ‘Our role is to hold the Government to account – crime figures are an excellent way of doing that’ National tabloid respondent.	Yes ‘Do expose bad performance’ ‘Can draw attention to system failures’ ‘Don’t think its their role – can facilitate a discussion around this’
<i>Inform policy development by government</i>	Yes by the national press respondents ‘We find a statistic we’ll ask about it’ National tabloid respondent. ‘Doesn’t work on a regional level’ Regional news respondent.	Yes ‘Ministers check what is going on in the press
<i>Understand the causes of crime, victimisation and offending</i>	Yes – broadsheet respondent ‘Don’t use this’ – Regional news respondent	
<i>Determine the personal risk and susceptibility to crime</i>	Mixed response from national press respondents. Yes – broadsheet respondent ‘Not about telling the public what is or isn’t a safe area.’ National tabloid respondent ‘Our remit’ Regional news respondent.	
<i>Inform the public of criminal activity in their area</i>	‘Doing that on a day to day basis’ Regional news respondent	Yes ‘Valid if done properly to promote sensible preventive measures, giving a realistic and balance picture rather than a distorted one’

The following comments are drawn from respondents from non national media and organisations.

#### **Comments from respondents**

“There are important functions that a free press perform, they are a marvellous thing and a pain in the arse.”

“[The media] are highly interested and mediated. They do not provide an honest broker role, unlikely ever to be.”

“[The media] do a very good job – on their own terms.”

“Their principal job is to communicate the information in as accurate a way as possible.”

“The media need to allow the general public time and space to ask legitimate questions.”

“The media construct their product around what they need to do – attract revenue sales.”

“One media respondent commented that an additional function of the media over and above those listed in the table above was ‘trying to define new types of crime.’”

#### **How well do the public understand crime statistics?**

There was a mixed response from both media and non media respondents in their assessment about how well the public understood crime statistics and in what the public wanted to know.

On the whole the assessment of the public’s understanding of crime statistics was more positive among media respondents than non media respondents. One non media respondent suggested ‘Some of the media’s skills in understanding the needs of the general public may be better than ours.’

## Public understanding of crime statistics

### Comments from respondents

“‘pretty minimally’, ‘not very’, they don’t ”

“people understand the figures in their simple form.”

“people understand reports to the police, don’t understand the BCS”

“attempts to explain recording practice to the public – [they] don’t care and don’t want to know”

“We are all publics that don’t understand statistics whether its crime, economic statistics. Why should the public be interested? [However,] we shouldn’t aim for ignorance.”

“massive misperception by the public”

### What are the public most interested in?

The assessment by respondents about what most interested the public (in relation to crime statistics) was mixed but taken across the range of responses it suggests that the public (or publics) are interested less in the types of crime statistics that are available than in statistics that provide a national, regional and local picture that offers a means of:

- holding government to account;
- holding local police (and other local agencies) to account;
- assessing how safe are the places where they and close others live, work and play;
- assessing how safe these places are to other places that they may have an affinity with and/or knowledge of.

One could argue that this is currently provided for through the national press, national broadcast media, regional press, regional broadcast media and local press. And from these different sources the public (publics) compile an impression about crime that is more or less complicated by the type and range of information that they choose to consume and take note of, which may appear as news or as a feature.

### Comments from respondents

“What’s going on in their communities [matters], The public don’t care terribly much about what’s going on elsewhere. Its that focus that fuels public unrest about sex offenders..[Its] public safety and the quality of people’s lives. They have a secondary interest in the state of the nation”

“What do the public want? Holding Government to account. [The] Public don’t view them [Crime statistics] as safety measures. People know whether its safe or not in their area.”

“[There] was a time when the public weren’t interested in holding the government to account Now they are, because government is asking the public to hold them to account.”

“[It’s] their own safety, the safety of others – gendered, men about the safety of womenfolk than themselves, parents about their kids.”

### **Are there other ways in which crime statistics can be communicated to the public?**

Perhaps the key factor that needs to be considered in the provision of information to the public is that of relevance. One could use the issues that the public (publics) are interested in as indicators of relevance and test information types against this. Elsewhere in this report, Case Study 1 examines the presentation and costs of making various national crime statistics available. What may require further examination is the relevance of these to the public.

Suggestions about the provision of information to the public are considered in the table below scored against potential 'public relevance' indicators.

**Figure 10: The reporting of national and regional crime-related statistics by the English regional press and media in devolved parts of the United Kingdom**

Data source	Public relevance				Issues that need to be addressed in releasing data to the public
	Holding government to account	Holding local agencies to account	Safety of places of work, living and play	Safety of places of affinity	
IQUANTA	✓	✓	✓	✓	<p>A public facing version of this could be made available to the public via the internet. The data are already there and available to police, crime and disorder reduction partnerships, members of police authorities (who arguably represent the public) If members of police authorities can understand it, then presumably the public can also.</p> <p>There may need to be some explanatory information made available to enable the public to understand how the information is compiled and presented. Along the lines of the notes provided by the Metropolitan Police on the part of their website which provides information on reported crimes.</p> <p>Key to this data is the ability of the public to make comparisons between their own areas and places of affinity i.e. neighbouring areas rather than places within the same CDRP family which may be remote, unknown to the individual and appear to be of no relevance. As an example, Liverpool is in the same CRDP family as Lincoln and Norwich (at one extreme) for which there may be little affinity to Manchester and Salford where a high degree of affinity is likely to be recognised.</p> <p>Not all members of the public, particularly those in deprived high crime areas have access to the internet. Other means of providing this information through for e.g. newsletters may need to be used.</p>
Index of crime	✓				

**Figure 10: The reporting of national and regional crime-related statistics by the English regional press and media in devolved parts of the United Kingdom (continued)**

Data source	Public relevance				Issues that need to be addressed in releasing data to the public
	Holding government to account	Holding local agencies to account	Safety of places of work, living and play	Safety of places of affinity	
Rolling crime statistics by police force area (e.g. Metropolitan police)		✓	✓	✓	
Rolling police statistics available for neighbourhood policing unit areas		✓	✓	✓	<p>Cheshire Police currently provide this for their neighbourhood policing unit teams on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday through the force intranet site.</p> <p>This could be considered as a future proofing measure as there is a target to establish neighbourhood policing teams in all parts of England and Wales by 2008. Providing figures on this basis would provide a direct accountability to the public, which are one of the drivers for neighbourhood policing.</p> <p>A public facing version of this could be made available to the public via the internet.</p> <p>Again not all members of the public have access to the internet therefore other means may need to be used to ensure that all members of public have access to this.</p>

The following comments are drawn from discussions with the English regional news journalist and the non media respondent from Wales.

### *English regions*

We occasionally use the British Crime Survey data but it's broken down by region rather than county.

The public want to compare where they live and/or work with other areas that they have an affinity with. For e.g. people in Liverpool don't want to compare themselves with people in London they want to compare themselves with people in Cheshire or Manchester.

Regional papers will not report on national crime statistics because:

The statistics are historic – the quarterly national crime statistics are made public four months after the period they relate to, for e.g. figures for the quarter up to the end of December 2005 were released in April 2006. The regional press receive copies of the police-recorded crime data for immediate previous quarter within a month of the last period. For e.g. the Liverpool regional media will receive the Merseyside police-recorded crime figures for the quarter up to the end of March 2006 in April 2006 as part of the papers submitted to the Merseyside Police Authority.

The way that statistics are released to the regional press – There is preferential release of national crime statistics to the national media and press association. They receive an embargoed release the night before the figures are made public by the Home Office. The same figures are not released to the regional press by the Home Office until 10.00am on the day that the statistics are made public. The copy deadline for the evening newspaper is 10.30am. This allows only 30 minutes to turn around an article. By the time that the regional evening newspaper is on sale, the national crime statistics will already have been covered (without reference to local or regional perspectives) by the national press, TV and radio, therefore it will be old news.

### *Wales*

The media in Wales are always concerned about having information about Wales and that this should be provided to the media and the public in English and Welsh.

'The constant desire for Welsh information exposes how poorly the information is [currently] presented.'

The Welsh Media like to compare the performance of Welsh Police forces with those in England, usually because the Welsh police come out better than English forces. In addition they are interested in comparisons with other devolved parts of the UK and international comparisons with other comparable countries in terms of size and also countries which have a dual language.

Information about the differences or similarities in services or treatment between Welsh language speakers and English speakers is a big issue with the media. As is for e.g. differences in the types of services that English offenders resettling in North Wales may receive compared with Welsh offenders.

The two driving policy issues in Wales are the economy and poverty levels. Crime and anti-social behaviour are on the fringes of both the two key issues. What concerns the Welsh Assembly Government and the public are what happens in the targeted economic regeneration areas of Wales such as the Heads of the Valleys Initiative. There needs to be a statistical sophistication to respond to these areas which may run over 4 and a half BCU areas. Organisations such as Jobcentre plus (which is a non devolved organisation) is able to provide statistics that match these areas. There is an expectation that crime-related statistics can be provided in the same way.



# 15 Appendix 6: An exercise in international comparisons of crime statistics within the UK

## Introduction

As an additional small case study, attempts have been made to compare the published statistical evidence from England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland that relate to 'violent crime', 'street robbery' and 'sexual offences'. The purpose of this desk based research is to give examples of some of the difficulties which currently arise, especially from the perspective of a non-expert user. Following these examples, the main issues identified by current literature are then documented.

## Police-recorded crime

When working with data regarding police-recorded crime, consideration needs to be made to the differences in crime recording practices. The NCRS was introduced in England & Wales in April 2002 and became a requirement of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in 2002/2003. In Scotland, the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS) was introduced in April 2004. It recommended the adoption of many of the principles established in the NCRS but with additional areas relevant to the Scottish perspective, such as incorporating additional elements around victimless crime, auditing procedures and circumstances where police happen upon a crime. In practice, these standards have meant that significant improvements have been made to the comparability of police-recorded crime statistics, however, there is evidence to suggest that differences in recording practices will still exist, even within an area covered by one standard<sup>55</sup>. Both standards are offence-based, *prima facie* approaches, ie the offence is recorded as described by the victim.

## Victimisation surveys

When working with data regarding victimisation surveys of populations, consideration needs to be made to the many different ways in which surveys can be carried out. Along with differences in the methods of surveying people (such as face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews), there can be great differences in the questions asked of the respondent and the method of sampling by which the respondent was selected in the first place. There are also human factors which cannot be discounted, such as dishonesty, non-response and exaggeration.

<sup>55</sup> [http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/NATIONAL-REPORT/B82E88A8-D192-4aaf-85E9-D2A3F864AF3E/Crime%20Data\\_finalproof\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/NATIONAL-REPORT/B82E88A8-D192-4aaf-85E9-D2A3F864AF3E/Crime%20Data_finalproof_WEB.pdf)

## **Police-recorded crime**

### **Police-recorded violent crime**

The table in Figure 11, below, shows the police-recorded crime types that are (or can be) aggregated into the category of violent crime in the relevant statistical publications. In the Scottish Executive's statistical bulletin<sup>56</sup>, there is no defined violent crime category, and so the crime types shown have been selected to mirror the types in England & Wales as far as is possible. The problems of crime classification and typology definition are demonstrated clearly. Some of the crime types included in England & Wales and Northern Ireland do not necessarily strongly relate to violent crime from a public user's perspective. 'Bigamy', 'possession of offensive weapons', 'illegal abortion' and even 'death by dangerous driving' are all examples of crime types which would not generally spring to mind in relation to a public understanding of 'violent crime'. Also, in attempting to match the Scottish and Northern Ireland crime types with those of England & Wales, there will always be some error, due to differences in typology. The Scottish Executive's statistical bulletin does not specify in great detail the classification of crimes, and so one can never be sure as to how appropriate the user's choice of crime types is for purposes of comparison.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/77843/0018640.pdf>

**Figure 11: Table showing types of offence within violent crime ' category (England & Wales, Northern Ireland) or that could be assessed as violent crime (Scotland) for national police-recorded crime publications**

Northern Ireland		England & Wales		Scotland	
Publication for period 2004/2005		Publication for period 2004/2005		Publication for period 2004/2005	
Offences against the person:		Offences against the person:		Non-sexual crimes of violence:	
murder	34	homicide <sup>57</sup>	859	Serious assault, etc	
manslaughter	6	attempted murder	736	Robbery	7,768
infanticide	1	conspiracy to murder	23,668	Other	3,736
attempted murder	129	child destruction	4		3,196
conspiracy to murder	1,371	death by dangerous driving	440		
death by dangerous driving	79	death by aggrav'd vehicle taking	40		
wounding with intent	403	more serious wounding w/intent	19,425		
wounding	768	endangering railway passenger	9	<b>Other crimes:</b>	
AOABH <sup>58</sup>	14,820	endangering life at sea	3	Handling off. weapon	
common assault	6,427	less serious wounding	485,195		9,545
aggravated assault	1,036	possession of weapons	35,727		
assault on police	2,118	harassment	194,157		
intimidation	1,038	racially agg. less serious wound.	5,312		
harassment	947	racially aggravated harassment	22,669		
explosives offensives	25	cruelty to children	5,675		
firearms offences	49	abandoning a child under 2 yrs	49		
other offences	88	child abduction	1,028		
		procuring illegal abortion	15		
		concealment of birth	6		
		assault on a constable	23,267		
		common assault	213,085		
		racially aggrav. common assault	3,677		

<sup>57</sup> Homicide comprises murder, manslaughter and infanticide

<sup>58</sup> AOABH – Assault occasioning actual bodily harm

**Figure 11: Table showing types of offence within 'violent crime' category (England & Wales, Northern Ireland) or that could be assessed as violent crime (Scotland) for national police-recorded crime publications (continued)**

Northern Ireland		England & Wales		Scotland	
Publication for period 2004/2005		Publication for period 2004/2005		Publication for period 2004/2005	
Sexual offences:		Sexual offences:		<b>Crimes of indecency:</b>	
rape	347	buggery	73	rape & attempted rape	1,109
attempted rape	33	indecent assault on a male	998	indecent assault	1,497
buggery	17	sexual assault on male 13+yrs	1,292	lewd & indec. behaviour	2,786
unlawful carnal w/girl under 14	13	sexual assault on male <13yrs	1,225	other	1,932
unlawful carnal w/girl 14 – 17	52	gross indecency between males	46		
indecent assault on female	283	rape of a female	728		
indecent assault on female child	331	rape of a female 16+yrs	8,159		
indecent assault on male	36	rape of female child <16yrs	3,006		
indecent assault on male child	96	rape of female child <13yrs	974		
indecency between males	13	rape of a male	81		
indecent exposure	393	rape of a male 16+yrs	441		
indecent conduct towards a child	15	rape of a male child <16yrs	320		

**Figure 11: Table showing types of offence within 'violent crime' category (England & Wales, Northern Ireland) or that could be assessed as violent crime (Scotland) for national police-recorded crime publications (continued)**

Northern Ireland		England & Wales		Scotland	
Publication for period 2004/2005		Publication for period 2004/2005		Publication for period 2004/2005	
Sexual offences:		Sexual offences:			
other sexual offences	57	rape of a male child <13yrs	293		
		indecent assault on female	5,112		
		sexual assault on female 13+yrs	14,635		
		sexual assault female <13yrs	4,373		
		unlawful sex. intercourse girl <13	19		
		sex. activity involving child <13yrs	1,481		
		unlawful sex. intercourse girl <16	436		
		sex. activity involving child <16yrs	2,522		
		causing sex. act. w/out consent	237		
		familial sexual offences	710		
		exploitation or prostitution	117		
		abduction	86		
		bigamy	105		
		soliciting of women by men	1,833		
		sex. act. w/person w/mental dis.	104		
		abuse of child by prost. or porn.	98		
		trafficking for sexual exploitation	21		
		abuse of position of trust	679		
		gross indecency with a child	396		
		sexual grooming	185		
		other misc. sexual offences	10,161	<b>Motor vehicle offences:</b>	
				dangerous and careless driving	13,062
<b>Robbery:</b>		<b>Robbery:</b>		<b>Miscellaneous offences:</b>	
robbery	559	robbery of business property	7,926	Petty assault	73,711
armed robbery	812	robbery of personal property	80,784		
hijacking	116				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32,512</b>		<b>1,184,702</b>		<b>118,342</b>

## **Police-recorded street robbery**

Categories related to robbery are included in the aggregation contained in Figure 1, above. It is not possible to make any conclusive statements about 'street robbery' from these data. The categories that could be included in such a crime typology are:

- robbery and armed robbery for Northern Ireland;
- robbery of personal property for England & Wales; and
- robbery for Scotland.

The only assumption that can be made with some confidence is that street robberies could be included within any of the above categories. However, even an attempt to compare any of the present types of robbery is unreliable due to the lack of any consistent categorisation.

## **Police-recorded sexual offences**

Categories related to sexual offences are included in the aggregation contained in Figure 1, above. Again there are numerous difficulties in making comparisons between the three sets of figures. The categorisations do not match; England & Wales present by far the greatest number of categories, Scotland the fewest. The inclusion of categories which may not be regarded from a public user's perspective as serious as the term 'sexual offences' suggests may also lead to confusion; in Northern Ireland, 'indecent exposure' contains the largest number of incidents recorded; in England & Wales, 'bigamy', 'abduction', 'soliciting of women by men', 'familial sexual offences' and 'abuse of position of trust' are included, with a large proportion of sexual offences remaining unspecified under the category 'other miscellaneous sexual offences'. In Scotland, there are only four categories included, with the two largest of these being 'lewd and indecent behaviour' and 'other'. Ideally, more detail would be beneficial in the description of each of the categories, especially where such category names are ambiguous or do not seem to represent a crime (eg, 'buggery', 'gross indecency between males').

**Figure 2: Table showing types of offence within ‘violent incidents’ category for national crime victimisation survey publications.**

Northern Ireland		England & Wales		Scotland	
Publication for period 2003/2004		Publication for period 2004/2005		Publication for period 2002	
<b>Common assault:</b> common assault attempted assault	59,000 <sup>59</sup>	wounding robbery common assault snatch theft <sup>60</sup>	577,000 255,000 1,488,000	robbery petty assault serious assault	19,404 174,477 46,010
<b>Wounding:</b> serious wounding (including sexual motive) other wounding (including sexual motive)					
<b>Mugging:</b> robbery attempted robbery snatch theft from the person					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>74,000</b>		<b>2,412,000</b>		<b>239,891</b>

## Personal victimisation surveys

### Victimisation survey violent crime

The inherent difficulties of making inter-country comparisons of violent crime using published crime survey data are demonstrated clearly in Figure 2, above. Despite having the most detailed description of crime types contained within the aggregation, the Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS) publication does not contain the figures for each of these crime types. Instead, only figures for the ‘Common assault’ aggregation and total (‘All NICS violence’) are provided. Another inconsistency with categorisation is the inclusion of ‘snatch theft from the person’, which, unlike robbery, is not actually defined as involving violence. Similarly, in the BCS for England and Wales, ‘snatch theft’ is also included in the total figure, despite not being published in the data table. Broadly speaking, the NICS and BCS categorisations are comparable, and so the total violent crime and ‘common assault’ (aggregated in the NICS) figures can be compared. The Scottish Crime Survey (SCS) has different categories to these, with ‘snatch theft’ and ‘wounding’ not included, and assault split into ‘petty’ and ‘serious’ categories.

<sup>59</sup> Although individual crime types included in the various categories are defined in the Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS) publication, only the figures for aggregated ‘common assault’ and the total of ‘All NICS violence’ (TOTAL) are presented, the figures published as multiples of a thousand.

<sup>60</sup> No figure is presented within the British Crime Survey (BCS) publication data tables for ‘snatch theft’ despite it being included in the total figure for ‘All violence’ (TOTAL).

The time periods for which the published data are relevant also vary greatly. The most recent NICS is published as being relevant to 2003/2004, however, the actual data collection occurred between August 2003 and April 2004, with a corresponding interviewee 'recall'<sup>61</sup> period of between August 2002 and March 2004. The BCS publication is stated as relevant to 2004/2005. The data collection time period was between April 2004 and March 2005, the corresponding interviewee recall period was April 2003 to March 2005. The SCS is published as relevant to 2003, the data collection period being March 2003 to June 2003 and the recall period being January 2002 to June 2003.

A final difference which may cause confusion to the inexperienced user is the way in which the NICS and BCS present data in multiples of thousands, whereas the SCS has counts stated to single units, even though each publication provides best estimates and lower and upper limits.

### **Victimisation survey street robbery**

Similarly to the police-recorded data, determining a comparison of 'street robbery' between the countries is difficult using the published data. Robbery is defined as containing an element of force, or the threat of force, on the part of the offender and so 'snatch theft', which is defined as involving no force or threat, cannot strictly be counted as street robbery. Ignoring 'snatch theft', the comparison that remains is between national survey figures for 'robbery'. As before, the types of crime included in this category and how great a proportion could reasonably be considered street robbery, is unclear, and any comparisons made would be tenuous.

### **Victimisation survey sexual offences**

Due to sample sizes being low in surveys, as compared to population sizes, and the incidence of these types of offence being low, no statistically meaningful data can be collected for sexual offences. Also, due to the sensitive nature of these types of offence, interviewees will not tend to report a sexual offence to the interviewer. The only sexually related information from the main published crime victimisation surveys is included in the category of 'wounding' in the NICS, which may include a sexual motive.

<sup>61</sup> The 'recall' period is the time period for which interviewees are asked to remember incidents taking place, usually the twelve month period before the interview date.

## Commercial victimisation surveys

There are two commercial victimisation surveys conducted in the UK. The largest of these is the Commercial Victimisation Survey (CVS) for England & Wales, the other is Crime Against Business in Scotland (CABS). There may be similar surveys conducted that are applicable to Northern Ireland, but no widely available official publications were found in our search. These surveys are generally not executed as frequently as those carried out for individual victimisation, the most recent for England & Wales being in 2002, and the most recent in Scotland being published in 2001 containing findings applicable to 1998. Also, many of the same differences identified for personal surveys apply for these surveys. Interviewing method, question design and sampling strategy can all have an impact.

The typologies of crime included in these surveys do allow for a comparison of victimisation rates for businesses in terms of violent crime, but there are slight differences due to aggregation. The CVS contains “Threat, assaults, intimidation” and “Robbery or attempted robbery”, whereas the CABS contains “Actual robberies”, “Attempted robberies”, “Violent attacks” and “Threats of violence”.

The greatest barrier to the increased use of these resources seems to be the infrequency with which they are conducted. Before 2002, the only other national CVS was carried out in 1994. The CABS has only been carried out once, in 1998. Other sources are available, such as the British Retail Consortium’s Retail Survey, which is published annually. However, these surveys may not have the same focus or methodological rigour applied to them as in the case of government statistics, and are often not freely available.

## Global victimisation surveys and crime comparisons

The Home Office no longer publishes international crime data. This responsibility has moved to Europe. There are however, several sources for comparing global crime statistics<sup>62</sup>. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute publishes findings from the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) which is undertaken every four years. It provides an interesting insight into the comparisons of incidence of certain crimes in the countries included. However, due to the expense of running surveys, only relatively small samples can be taken (between 1,000 and 2,000 respondents), and these are generally focused on major cities.

The United Nations (UN) also publishes the UN Crime Survey every five years. The publication aims to include police crime data for selected offences under standard definitions for all UN member states. The survey suffers from poor quality and inconsistent data and is not published in a timely manner due to a lack of resources. It also does not take into account the wide differences in definitions and statistical rules between countries. Interpol also collect and publish police crime statistics, but this survey suffers the same shortcomings of the UN Crime Survey.



# 16 Appendix 7: Expert seminar attendees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Richard Alldritt	Statistics Commission
Katy Barratt	Scottish Executive
Simon Cole	ACPO
Fiona Crosby	West Yorkshire Police Authority
Pat Dowdeswell	Home Office (RDS NOMS)
Stephen Farrall	Keele University
Brian French	Northern Ireland Office
Marian Fitzgerald	–
Chris Fox	Matrix
Richard Garside	Crime and Society Foundation
Chris Hale	University of Kent
Rosalyn Harper	Statistics Commission
Tim Hope	Keele University
Barrie Irving	Keele University
Chris Kershaw	Home Office
Sam Mackay	Matrix
Mike Maguire	University of Cardiff
George Mair	Liverpool John Moores University
Kevin Marsh	Matrix
Carol McDonald	Metropolitan Police
Susan McVie	University of Edinburgh
Britta Moeller	Statistics Commission
Garry Parkins	Home Office
David Povey	Home Office
Allen Ritchie	Statistics Commission
Jon Simmons	Home Office
Alison Walker	Home Office
Peter Warner	Thames Valley Police
Martin Weale	Statistics Commission



# 17 Appendix 8: Organisations sent Delphi

Organisation	Number of individuals
Accountants (Institute of Management Accounting)	1
ACPO	2
ADSW	2
Association of British Insurers (ABI)	1
Association of Independent Financial Advisers (AIFA)	2
Association of London Government	1
Association of Payment Clearing Services	1
BBA (British Bankers Association)	2
BBC	1
Bedfordshire Police	1
Blackwoods distillers	1
BME CCP	1
BMRB	1
Break the Pattern	1
Bristol University	1
British Crime Survey (BCS)	2
British Venture Capital Association (BVCA)	1
Bullying Online	1
C&CEMG	4
Centrex	1
Cheshire Constabulary	2
Children in Northern Ireland	1
Children in Scotland	1
Citizen's Advice Bureau	1
City of London Police	1
Commission for Racial Equality Scotland	1
Community Safety Unit	3
Corporate Television Networks Ltd	1
Council of Mortgage Lenders (CML)	1
Crime and Drugs Team	1
Crime and Society Foundation	1
Crimestoppers	1
Criminal Justice Research Team	1
CSV	1
Daily Telegraph	1
DCA	1

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Number of individuals</b>
DCA Analysis	3
DCA Data Collection	1
DCA Internal Customers	2
Derbyshire Constabulary	2
Durham Constabulary	1
Esmee Fairburn Foundation	1
Essex Uni	1
Ethnic minority Foundation	1
Experian	1
Finance and Leasing Association (FLA)	1
Force crime registrars – England and Wales	1
Foreign Banks and Securities Houses Association (FBSA)	1
Futures and Options Association (FOA)	2
Government Office for London	1
Greater London Authority	1
Guardian	4
Herbert Smith (Lawyers)	3
Hertfordshire Police	2
HM Courts Service	2
HO	2
HO – Research Development Statistics	7
HO – Violent Crime Unit	1
HO Anti-Social Behaviour Unit	1
HO Crime Reduction Delivery Team	2
HO Crime Strategy Unit	1
HO Criminal Justice Interventions Programme Unit	1
HO Drug Legislation and Enforcement Unit	1
HO HM Inspectorate of Constabulary	1
HO Judicial Cooperation Unit	1
HO Organised and Financial Crime	1
HO Partnership and Regions Drugs Unit	1
HO Police Human Resources Unit	1
HO Police Leadership and Powers Unit	1
HO Police Performance Management Unit	1
HO Police Reform Unit	1
HO Strategy, Co-ordination and Planning Drug Unit	1

Organisation	Number of individuals
HO Street Crime Action Team	1
HO Violent Crime Unit/Domestic Violence Unit	1
Home Office	2
Home Office – BCS	1
Home Office – Offending Surveys Section	1
Horwath Consulting Ireland	1
Humberside Police	1
Humberside Police Authority	1
Independent	1
International Association of Prosecutors	1
IPPR	2
ISER University of Essex	1
Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science	4
Justice – human rights organisation	1
Kent Police	1
Kent Police Headquarters	1
Lancashire Police	1
Law Society of England and Wales	2
LCJB – Humberside	1
Lincolnshire	1
Liverpool John Moores University	2
Local Government Association	1
London Investment Banking Association (LIBA)	1
London Probation Board	1
Market Research UK	2
Matrix/Campbell Collaboration	1
Merseyside Police Authority	1
Met Police performance	1
Metropolitan Police Service	4
MHA – specialist consultancy	3
Ministers for Justice	2
Morgan Harris Burrows	1
Mori	1
MOSIAC Scotland	1
MP	27
MP Northern Ireland	9

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Number of individuals</b>
MP Scotland	20
MRUK research	1
Nacro	3
NAPO	2
NatCen	2
National Association of Civic Officers	1
National Children's Bureau	1
National Probation Service	1
National Union of Journalists	1
NCSN/CDRPs	17
NILGA (Northern Ireland Local Government Association)	1
NOMS	4
Northern Ireland Court Service	1
Northern Ireland Office	7
Northern Ireland Prison Service	2
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency	3
Northumbria Police	2
NUS Northern Ireland	1
NUS Wales	1
ODPM	6
ONS/GSS	9
PEP & ISA Managers' Association (PIMA)	2
Police Authority	4
Police Ombudsmans Office	1
Police Reform Unit	1
Police Service of Northern Ireland	1
Police Standards Unit	1
Policing Board	1
Prison Reform Trust	1
Prison Statistics	1
Probation Board for Northern Ireland	2
Probation Board of Northern Ireland	3
Probation Inspectorate	1
Public Prosecution Service	1
Queen's University Belfast	1
Queen's School of Law	3

Organisation	Number of individuals
Queen's University Belfast	2
RDS(CRCSG)	1
Recorded Crime Statistics	1
Research and Evaluation services	1
Revolving Doors Agency	1
Royal Courts of Justice	1
SACRO	1
ScotCen	1
Scottish Childrens Reporter Administration	1
Scottish Council Foundation	1
Scottish Criminal Records Office	1
Scottish Executive	3
Scottish Executive – Criminal Justice Research Team	3
Scottish Executive Justice Analytical Services Division	1
Shell Petroleum	1
Shelter England	1
South Yorkshire Police	3
Superintendents' Association	2
Thames Valley Police	1
The Board of Deputies of British Jews	1
The Howard League for Penal Reform	1
The Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science	1
The Observer	1
The Parole Board	1
The Sun	1
Times	1
University of Cambridge – Institute of Criminology	3
University of Cardiff	2
University of Edinburgh	2
University of Glasgow	1
University of Keele	3
University of Kent	1
University of Manchester	1
University of Sheffield	3
University of Stirling	2
University of Strathclyde	1

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Number of individuals</b>
University of Wales – Violence Research Group	1
Warwickshire Police Authority	1
Welsh Assembly	2
West Yorkshire Police Authority	1
West Yorkshire Probation Board	1
Wholesale Market Brokers' Association (WMBA)	1
Wilton Park Conference	3
Women & Equality Unit	1
YJB	6
York University	1

# 18 Appendix 9: Statistics and data on offending and offenders

Although statistics and data on offending and offenders did not constitute a core element of the Review, it was nevertheless important to consider this area as part of the context for understanding the crime statistics that formed the core focus of the Review.

## Data

The collection of offender data, in terms of real distribution of convicted offenders, or of those with issues such as drug problems, can help to compliment offence data and facilitate a better understanding of patterns in crime. Although there are some issues around data quality, much insight can be added using these data, although it generally tends to be under-exploited, with approximately two thirds of the respondents to the Delphi study expressing an opinion that the data are not used effectively.

There are two generic sources of data on offending and offenders:

- self-reports from surveys; and
- agency data.

## Self-reported data

Much the same kinds of advantages and disadvantages that affect the collection and use of self-reported victimisation data also affect self-reported offending data (i.e. they capture un-recorded crime, surveys are complicated and expensive to organise regularly, they are difficult to generalise to local areas, etc.).

## Agency data

Agency data, eg data from local Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), are generally less robust than self-report data, again similarly affected by a range of institutional 'selection biases'. Agency data are generally recorded by personnel with little research or statistical interest or expertise, who may lack the understanding of how the data potentially could be used, and how data quality could be improved. Additionally, the absence of national statistics for offenders under 18 restricts the analysis and planning that can be developed. Also, as a prisoner does not necessarily keep the same unique identification through the whole time they are in prison it is difficult to track individual criminal justice 'careers' or to develop 'flow' statistics for criminal justice, at least nationally. These issues restrict the quality and validity of the analysis that can be carried out.

## Using offender data

One respondent to the Delphi suspected that “[...] subjective interpretation of data and perceptions are often being relied upon rather than rational analysis and interpretation of data.” One of the big issues with offender data is that they are not very easy to utilise and manipulate. Both OASys (the new Offender Assessment System) and The Offenders Index are difficult to use, owing to the manually intensive matching process with PCN data (for the offender index) and because of the level of data accuracy associated with OASys. Only by effectively linking OASys data to sentences would it be possible to examine sentencing policy. Although there is a considerable amount of information available in OASys, this is not yet publicly available, and does not cover all sentences. It is particularly focused on high-risk cases (there is no information available for those fined or discharged.)

With so much happening at a local level with regard to offenders, national research may fail to account for significant local variations. Increasingly there is greater regionalisation in relation to offenders. Regional managers in the National Probation Service (NPS) and National Offender Management Service (NOMS) will require data appropriate to their area for commissioning services.

## Data quality

The main issues with offender data needing to be addressed are that it is not of sufficient quality or availability to allow the potential of offender data to be fully realised. In particular, this relates not only to the initial recording of accurate data, but also to issues regarding linking offender data to other sources of information. Equally, given the many limitations acknowledged with reconviction rates, there is a need to examine the quality of the data used, along with the methods of calculating reconviction risk. There continues to be a lack of joining up of data between that held by the police, probation, YOTs, the prison service, and qualitative research about offenders (eg Home Office research). Whilst it is already difficult to join this existing data from the different criminal justice agencies, there is potential that this situation will worsen as new non-statutory agencies and providers enter the system following the introduction of ‘contestability’ as part of the new National Offender Management System (NOMS).

Whilst there is a self-reporting offender survey, there are many issues with self-reported offender data. In particular, there are perverse incentives which one respondent summarised in the comment below:

### Delphi participant

The idea that viable data about offending can be drawn from offenders is ridiculous. There are 1000 reasons why these people would and do lie. Fear of persecution, ego, bravado, lack of self perception etc. etc. and the information they give may be under reported or over, so it can't be 'allowed for.'”

Although this has been an issue that has been subject to much methodological examination in criminological research, it still remains an issue, certainly in the minds of practitioner-users. Yet, there is a danger that the only data available are agency data on those who admit to crimes or those who get caught. Such issues of lack of user-confidence and selection bias constitute severe limitation on the current usefulness of offender data.



# 19 Appendix 10: Diversity

As it can be difficult to ask individuals about their disabilities, or social class etc, it can make it difficult to collect data around some diversity factors. As such, this can lead to data collectors making guesses, based on looks, which can lead to inaccurate, or incomplete data, and is reflected in the statements below made by Delphi participants.

## Delphi participants

“Do we really want to collect information from all victims & offenders on disability [...], or their social class [...], or faith [...]. Many people resent being asked such questions – what business is it of yours? – or are suspicious as to why the police want to record such personal information.”

“The problem here is that the data used to produce these statistics is woefully inadequate.”

One of the issues in measuring diversity is that potential differences based on factors such as race are actually the result of different socio-economic backgrounds rather than explicitly influenced by race. This was illustrated in Home Office Findings 237<sup>63</sup>:

People from black and minority ethnic backgrounds were at greater risk of experiencing crime overall than the white majority for the 2002/03 BCS, but the difference disappeared after allowing for the younger age profile of the black and minority ethnic group. There had been no change for the 2001/02 BCS.

In a briefing note prepared for the review<sup>64</sup>, Marian Fitzgerald details the information currently available by ethnic group (for victim-related information this includes BCS interviews, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), and police data):

*BCS:* The size and methodology for BCS was changed in 2001 and the focus on Black and Minority Ethnic victims was increased with the enhanced use of a booster sample for Black and Minority Ethnic participants. The intention was to move to using the 16 Census categories to classify minority ethnic respondents. The technical report on the 2002/03 report acknowledges previously unacknowledged problems with the sampling of ethnic minorities prior to 2001.

<sup>63</sup> Findings 237, Ethnicity, victimisation and worry about crime: findings from the 2001/02 and 2002/03 British Crime Surveys, Home Office, Heather Salisbury and Anna Upson, 2004, <http://www.blink.org.uk/docs/homeoffice/r237.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> Briefing note on the availability and limitations of ethnic data Appendix, Marian Fitzgerald, 2005

*Police data:* This is particularly used for understanding the volume of different types of racist incidents such as harassment, other wounding, criminal damage and common assault. Additionally these data can be used to understand clear up rates. The figures for this have shown considerable volatility. Additionally, police data can give information about homicide figures by ethnic group.

*CPS:* This gives information about levels of racially aggravated offences at magistrates and Crown Court, by age band and by outcome.

In addition to victim level data, it is also possible to get data relating to offenders by ethnic group. This has included:

**Figure 12: Table showing sources of offender data**

Data source	Data available
Police	Police searches of the public are recorded and although this has been the focus of much attention it is actually accounts for only very small volumes. Equally, police data can provide information regarding arrest and caution rates.
CPS	There is a large gap in the availability of suitable data from the CPS. This has relied largely on manual trawls to determine ethnicity, although in principle this should be automatically provided.
Prison service	There is an absence of reliable court data, making it impossible to know the proportion of all defendants remanded in custody. However, it is possible to compare the proportion of different groups in the remand population with the proportion in receptions of sentenced prisoners by offence type.
Probation service	Probation race data have been published in last year's sec 95 publication.
Crown and magistrates courts	These data record outcomes and volumes of trials. The data are currently incomplete at the moment, and there are in some circumstances particular difficulties in identifying the race of suspects.
YOTs	Details of outcomes and the types of offences for which individuals are charged and prosecuted are recorded by ethnic group. There is some uncertainty relating to the numbers originally arrested.

### British Crime Survey

The BCS has never used interpreters so it may be biased against the experience of sections of the poorer groups who are less likely to speak English, and who may have higher than average levels of victimisation. A particular example of this is female respondents in the Pakistani/Bangladeshi group whose statistical risk profile may be unrepresentative. In general, there have been lower response rates among ethnic minorities, although this may be a reflection of the higher non-response rates which

are commonly found generally in metropolitan areas and among young people. For example, the technical report for the 2002-3 Survey shows that only 50 per cent of interviews were achieved with 'non-white' respondents.

Recruiting through focused enumeration may bias results, reflecting localised patterns of experience and will distort comparisons with results for the white majority. This is complicated by the national distribution of BEM groups, and their greater representation in the Greater London area. Additionally, there is an absence of information on the composition of the sample in each ethnic group *before* weighting by key characteristics (in addition to area of residence) such as age, gender and socio-economic status. This makes it difficult to know whether like is being compared with like in terms of inter-ethnic comparisons within any given sweep and may make it unreliable to infer trends in the experiences of particular groups from one sweep to another.

### Gaps in crime statistics

There were a number of suggestions from Delphi respondents for what they would like to see in the future. These included:

Potential change	Explanation
<i>More information/ weighting on the impact of demographics</i>	Many of the differences between statistics for different minority groups can be explained through demographic factors so it would be useful for raw to data to be published to help explain this.
<i>More information on the effect of discrimination on likely victimisation and offending</i>	How do poverty, policy and discrimination affect the likelihood of individuals from a minority group becoming a victim of crime, or an offender?
<i>Need more information in the public domain which links minority data to actual crimes</i>	It is of limited use to collect information on diversity if we do not understand the impact of it.



# 20 Appendix 11: ACPO Submission<sup>65</sup>

Below is the text of a document submitted to the Review team by ACPO.

## **ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS (ACPO) DISCUSSION PAPER – SUBMISSION TO THE STATISTICS COMMISSION REVIEW OF CRIME STATISTICS**

ACPO welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Statistics Commission on what is a key issue for the police service.

Crime Statistics are at the heart of policing. On a day-to-day basis, the prevention and investigation of crime is a key task performed by thousands of police officers and police staff all across England and Wales. Resourcing levels, deployment strategies and investigations are all based on crime statistics and crime data.

ACPO broadly supports the view of the issues outlined within the document “Crime Statistics: Users Perspectives”, including the principle that in order to increase public trust, the process of compiling and publishing the statistics should be put “at arm’s length” from the policy functions of government and should be seen to be so.

ACPO seeks:

- An understanding that the most accurate picture of crime trends is not to be obtained from Recorded Crime Statistics but from a combination of methods, some that are independent from the Police, such as the BCS.
- Crime Statistics that are accurate and have integrity and credibility.
- Crime Statistics that make sense to their users and the public at large, and genuinely assist understanding of crime problems.
- Crime Statistics that support and inform delivery by the police service and partners.
- Crime Statistics that give a meaningful comparative understanding.
- Clarity of purpose in relation to the use made of recorded crime figures and BCS data.

<sup>65</sup> Simon Cole, ACPO lead – Crime Statistics, 25 January 2006

**From ACPO's perspective the key issues which we would seek to be considered by the Statistics Commission are;**

1. The advantages of the BCS (and other survey methods) over Recorded Crime Statistics, in presenting a more accurate picture of real crime rates and variations in these, over time.
2. The need for greater granularity, to BCU/CDRP level, of the BCS.
3. Whether the current breadth of data capture of notifiable offences adds value and helps public understanding of crime issues.
4. The need for disaggregation of violent crime data.
5. The cost of processing recorded crime data against the benefits of processing those data.
6. Criminalisation and perverse incentives caused by contradictory performance regimes.
7. Will Neighbourhood Policing and Contact Management increase recorded crime?
8. Recorded Crime Data should include that of non Home Office Forces.

**1. The advantages of the BCS (and other survey methods) over Recorded Crime Statistics in presenting a more accurate picture of real crime rates and variations in these over time.**

The BCS is carried out in a consistent manner throughout England and Wales. It measures people's experiences of crime in a way that is entirely independent from the police

The BCS, however, is independent of any changes or inconsistencies in police crime recording procedures, Home Office Counting Rule changes and also patterns and trends in public reporting of crimes to police, all of which skew the police-recorded crime figures to such an extent that they are rendered somewhat ineffective for the purpose of genuine medium- or long-term crime level measurement.

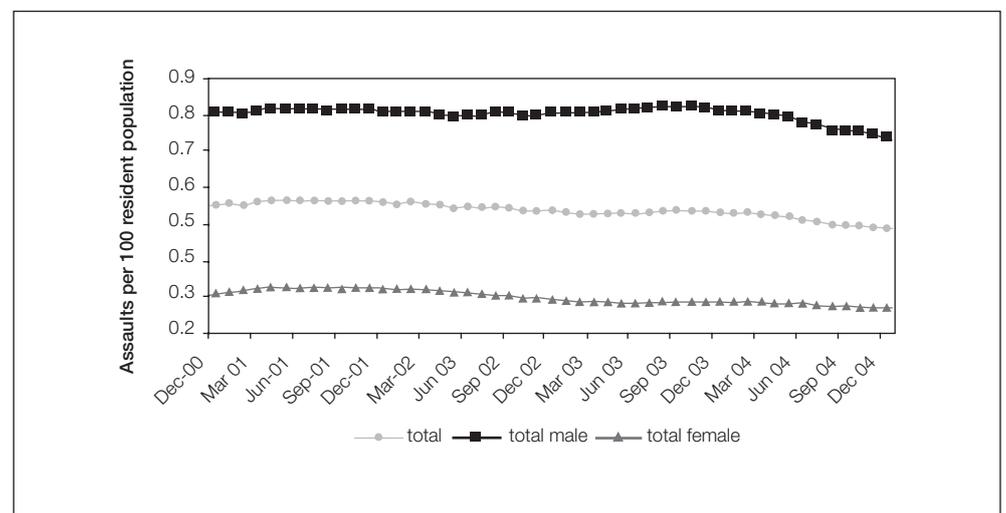
Therefore, the BCS (or a similarly independent, standard and consistent survey) should be the principal tool for measuring patterns and changes in personal and household crime levels throughout England and Wales. It is these findings that should primarily be used for wider publication to inform the public, to support political decision making, and ultimately to judge police performance in reducing crime.

The suggestion that the BCS is extended to cover under 16 year olds is welcomed. The suggestion that the Home Office could carry out surveys of commercial/industrial victimisation is also worthy of scoping/development, together with exploration of potential alternatives to surveys. For example, there may be opportunities to acquire and utilise data held by commercial insurers.

A study led by Professor Jonathan Shepherd of Cardiff University and Director of The Violence Research Group discovered that only 23 per cent of persons attending Accident and Emergency Departments as a result of being victims of violent crime reported the offence to the police. The study also revealed that proportionately more women reported the crime to the police and proportionately fewer victims recorded the crime when injured on Saturdays and in bars.

Figure 1 below is an extract from the study examining the number of admissions into emergency units as a result of violence and assaults. The findings of this research suggest that the number of people admitted to casualty units as a result of violent crime in England has fallen by 13 per cent between 2000 and 2004, and by 20 per cent in Wales.

**Figure 1: Trends (twelve point moving averages) in serious violence by gender in England and Wales (January 2000 to December 2004). Male  $p < 0.001$ , female ( $p = 0.001$ ) and total ( $p = 0.0001$ ) serious violence decreased significantly**



This adds support to concerns over reliance on police-recorded crime statistics as a trend indicator and to measure police performance. It also raises the question regarding reliance on such data to make tactical police deployment decisions at a local level, especially in the area of violent crime.

## **2. The need for greater granularity, to BCU/CDRP level, of the BCS.**

There is a continuing difference between BCS indications of crime levels and the patterns of recorded crime. While these distinct data sources are comparable at force level and allow potentially divergent accounts of crime levels to be considered, this is not the case at the granularity of BCU/CDRP. Experience within some forces has shown that the BCS Comparator (which includes common assault) does not always accurately reflect the pattern of crime reduction shown by the force when measured by the BCS, particularly for police services that are moving from lower to higher levels of NCRS compliance or are undertaking initiatives to encourage reporting or to enhance enforcement of particular crime types. The case for extending the BCS to BCU/CDRP level should be re-examined in order that communities may have the most accurate information available to them. At present the BCS does not provide adequate local detail; this is likely to be exacerbated by the potential for the creation of larger Forces within the current Strategic Forces debate.

BCS figures are collected using a survey of a large and representative sample of the population. The crime rates within this sample population are then multiplied by the actual population size to give an estimated figure of the actual level of crime. These figures are therefore not affected by changes in recording practice. Whilst the BCS is not without its problems it is generally accepted as a reliable indicator of victimisation. The police-recorded crime figures, however, are open to influence by recording practices. The NCRS was introduced to deliver improved consistency in recording practices between forces. Furthermore the NCRS shifted the emphasis of crime recording to a victim focused one. Whilst this standard was introduced in 2002, work undertaken by the Audit Commission, during 2003 & 2004 indicate that 60 per cent of forces at that point had yet to meet the Home Office standard (Audit Commission 2004). As crime recording becomes even more accurate, levels of recorded crime, and in particular recorded violent crime, could continue to rise.

## **3. Does the current breadth of data capture of notifiable offences add value and helps public understanding of crime issues?**

ACPO would acknowledge that the crime statistics data in relation to recorded crime are as good now as they have ever been. However, over recent years considerable numbers of offences have been added to the notifiable offence list.

## CRIME CHANGES

The 1980 counting rules and crime classifications were unchanged until 1997

New rules/offences were introduced in April 1998.

New HO classification		Annual Increase
104	Assault on a constable	21510
105	Common assault	151469
27	Soliciting or importuning by a man	1107
126	Vehicle interference or tampering	48011
53	Fraud offences	99164
92	Possession of drugs	112792
75	Betting,gaming,lotteries	48
78	Immigration offences	505
81	Firearms Act offences	3325
82	Customs and Revenue offences	119
83	Bail offences	66
84	Trade descriptions	263
85	Health and safety offences	7
86	Obscene publications	603
87	Protection from eviction	68
89	Adulteration of food	69
90	Knives Act offences	99
91	Public health offences	9
94	Planning laws	2
139	Indecent exposure	10327
802	Dangerous driving	4589

The main change to the counting rules was to reflect one crime per victim.

In April 1999, further new offences were added

8D/8E	Racially aggravated offences	21600
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In 2000/01 a further addition to sexual offences

73	Abuse of position of trust	417
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In April 2002 the NCRS was introduced

In 2004/05 sexual offences were revamped introducing

70	Sexual activity with person with mental disorder
71	Abuse of children (prostitution/pornography)
72	Trafficking for sexual exploitation
88a	Sexual grooming
88b	Other miscellaneous sexual offences

Each such offence is recorded and subject to a process of assessment, analysis, allocation and investigation by the police. Due to the nature of many of these offences being more minor crimes coupled with how they come to police notice, ACPO believe they do not contribute to deliberations on trends in crime as much as may be assumed and that they are distorting the overall performance picture and with it public perceptions of the true risk of crime.

Many of these minor crimes are of such a nature that they can never be accurately captured via formal and bureaucratic recording systems. For example, minor public order offences occur in their hundreds in every town and city centre outside licensed premises on any weekend evening. Evidence of this can be seen from viewing any public CCTV taken in these areas or any of the many sensationalist television programmes that now show such events as prime time television.

Only a tiny fraction of these are ever recorded by the Police. The occasions when they are recorded are; the Police come across the offence in progress and take positive action, the incident is phoned in by a witness or a formal complaint is made. Changes in the levels of such offences recorded reflect changes in the levels of policing far more than any real world changes.

In fact data from the BCS for the year 2004/05 count overall crime as 10,850,000, whereas police-recorded crimes stand at 5, 562,700, just half that number.

In contrast a number of serious criminal offences, which carry a significant penalty in both theory and practice (e.g. Disqualified Driving, Drink Driving, Driving under the influence of Drugs) are not classed as recorded crimes. This tends to discredit any assertion that the current range of recorded crimes is based on any logical and rational assessment of the seriousness of the offence.

A more logical basis is needed as to which offences are regarded as crimes and what are regarded as lower grade offences. This should be based on some consistent assessment of their seriousness.

This is not to argue that information should not be kept on the lower level offences or that they should not be followed up by police action, where appropriate. Many such offences fall into the category of anti-social behaviour and are quite properly targeted by Neighbourhood Policing Teams. There is an expectation from the public that such matters are dealt with 'as a whole' together with partners and by police officers who are 'on the street' and not invisible through bureaucracy.

#### 4. The need for disaggregation of violent crime data.

ACPO agrees with the assertion that the classification and presentation of violent crime data should be examined.

In 1998 low level, public order offences and harassment, together with assaults not involving personal injury, were added to the list of notifiable offences. Examination of the specific area of violent crime shows that their inclusion in recorded crime, inflated violent crime figures by 71 per cent between the reporting years 1997/98 and 1998/99. Overall this produced a 12 per cent rise in recorded crime.

Following the introduction of the NCRS in 2002 that position was exacerbated with a further 22 per cent rise in recorded 'violent' crime. The NCRS effect has been magnified within this crime category in particular due to the multitude of offences classified as 'violent' crime. There are currently some 58 separate headings within 'violent' crime, which are further subdivided. In total there are in excess of 300 separate criminal offences captured within this single performance indicator. It is therefore understandable that the public continues to be confused about the actual trends in violent crime. The public may be forgiven for believing that violent crime refers to an incident where a person suffers actual physical injury rather than bigamy for example. The current methods of classification, monitoring and publication of these incidents cannot be assisting the public reassurance agenda or helping communities' understanding of crime trends.

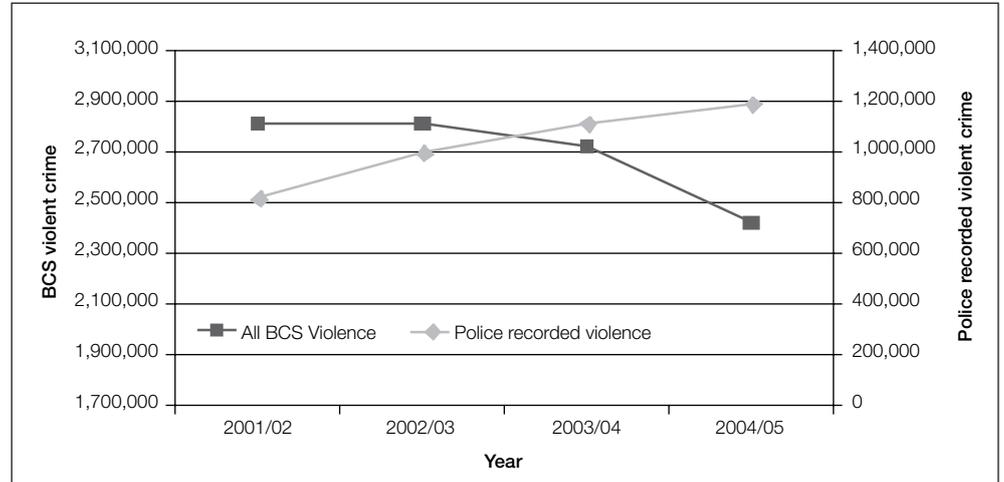
It should be remembered that although the NCRS has brought this problem into even starker contrast, the NCRS is not itself the problem. All the NCRS states is that when an offence classed as a crime is reported to the Police it should be recorded in a consistent manner between Forces (to allow comparability as far as possible). The basis for this consistent recording would be victim centred – that is to say, unless there are good reasons to think otherwise, the fact that a person was reporting a crime would generally be enough for it to be recorded.

What the NCRS initially exposed was just how few Forces had attempted to record the new crimes that had been added to the Recorded Crimes list in 1998, and in due course, just how difficult it was to standardise the recording of these offences.

If the rise produced by the implementation of the NCRS was not significant enough the introduction of penalty notices for disorder (PND) have compounded the situation further. With the national increased focus on alcohol-related violence and antisocial behaviour (ASB) there is good evidence that the availability of PNDs is driving up the recording of less serious crime.

Figure two, below shows the four-year trend in police-recorded violent crime compared with the BCS violent crime levels. This clearly shows the simultaneous rise in police-recorded crime and fall in BCS violent crime.

**Figure 2: Four-year trend in police-recorded violent crime compared with BCS violent crime**



Analysis of the violent crime category suggests that the level of serious violent crime i.e. those that result in injury to the victim such as section 47, 20 or 18 assaults have remained fairly constant. It would appear that in the main the recent rises in 'violent' crime have emanated from increased recording of more minor offences such as public order, harassment and common assault. This proposition is supported by the fall in violent crime according to BCS and health service figures as outlined above. It is estimated by ACPO that as much as 50 per cent of the offences contained within the current 'violence' figures has not lead to any injury being sustained. It would therefore appear logical to split the current violent crime figures into those that result in actual physical injury and those that do not.

There appears to be widespread agreement that the offences included within the current 'violence' category are too wide to be meaningful and it is highly possible that this situation is not assisting the public reassurance agenda.

The current recorded violent crime figures appear unfit for purpose and are in urgent need of disaggregation to reflect the seriousness of injuries sustained and the impact of positive police initiatives.

### **5. The opportunity costs of processing recorded crime data against the benefits of processing those data.**

The addition of some 964,391 annual crimes to the recorded crime statistics since 1998 has a considerable impact on police resources.

An analysis of crime statistics going back as far as 1977, show that there were 24.7 recorded crimes per officer in 1977. The figures as of March 2005 indicated that there are now 39.4 recorded crimes per officer. This is in reality an increase of almost 60 per cent per officer-recorded crime, over that period.

Fundamentally the status of some of these incidents now being recorded crimes is open to question. However, such incidents will be captured under NSIR, at least as effectively, and at a considerably reduced cost. Some detailed activity based costing is needed to quantify the cost savings, but the Business Process Map at Appendix A provides an indication of areas where savings may be evident.

Additionally, with the increasing focus on the Sanction Detection rate, it is becoming imperative for the Police Service to fully investigate and attempt to obtain a sanction detection for as many recorded crimes as possible. The net result is that not only is significant police time spent in recording minor offences as crimes, but once recorded they must be given disproportionate follow up effort to wring every last detection out of them.

These data are then subject to the NCRS inspection regime with additional resource implications. The original purpose of the NCRS was to provide a framework within which recorded crime data could be reliably compared between forces and so support emerging national performance monitoring and management arrangements.

This was both helpful and necessary for the public, the police service and Government. However, the focus has moved away from ensuring that substantive and objective offences such as burglary and vehicle crime are recorded consistently. Instead, the NCRS (and the national audits that assess compliance with it) now effectively enforce a disproportionately exhaustive approach to the recording of minor and subjective offences, particularly in respect of 'violent' and low-level public order offences.

This 'completist' approach has perpetuated the production of competing narratives in respect of crime within England and Wales. The BCS provides an authoritative indication that crime is falling across England and Wales. However, the more process-sensitive mechanism of police-recorded crime, combined with an increased emphasis on recording offences at the margins of both the NCRS and public concern, produced a much more mixed picture.

For example, in 2004-5 one force invested significant time and resources in improving its level of compliance with the NCRS. The net result was that while recorded crime fell nationally, recorded offences rose by two per cent within the constabulary, largely owing to a 30 per cent increase in recorded 'violent' crimes. This caused the force to be viewed as a relatively poor performer within its 'Most Similar Force' family in terms of reducing crime and placed commensurate pressure on its constituent BCUs.

In contrast, the BCS indicated that both household and personal crime had fallen within the force area at a greater rate than average national or MSF reductions in the same period.

Recorded crime rates per 1,000 population (with per cent change from 2003/4):

	All recorded crime (No.)	All recorded crime (rates)	Violence against the person <sup>66</sup>	Robbery	Burglary	Theft and handling stolen goods	Theft of and from vehicles <sup>67</sup>	Criminal damage <sup>68</sup>	Drug offences <sup>69</sup>
Constabulary	97,065	93 (+2)	16 (+36)	1 (-10)	11 (-5)	34 (-5)	13 (-19)	20 (+4)	2 (+5)
Constabulary's Region	481,963	88 (-5)	16 (+8)	1 (+4)	10 (-16)	33 (-9)	11 (-16)	20 (-2)	3 (-2)
England and Wales	5,562,691	105 (-7)	20 (+8)	2 (-13)	13 (-17)	38 (-11)	14 (-17)	22 (-2)	4 (-5)

BCS Risk of victimisation, 2004/5, and comparison with previous year:

	% Victimised at Least Once (2003/4 figures in brackets)		
	Constabulary	Constabulary's Region	England and Wales
Household	14* (19)	15* (17)	18 (20)
Personal	6 (9)	5* (7)	6 (7)

\*indicates a statistically significant decrease

This kind of disconnection between BCS and recorded crime is not unique and has real effects and hidden costs. While the 'perverse incentives' introduced by the current NCRS approach and the case for the BCS to be extended to BCU/CDRP level are dealt with elsewhere in this submission, it may be relevant to highlight a number of related risks here.

In general, the Home Office view of police performance and its decisions to 'engage' forces and/or BCUs are heavily based on readily accessible and regularly updated recorded crime data. There is a real danger that such engagement may be misdirected owing to a reliance on NCRS-derived data and the lack of timely BCS data available at a sufficient level of granularity.

Similarly, there is a risk that changes within forces that affect crime-recording levels may produce apparent crime trends that cause resources within individual forces to be redirected to tackle issues that may be as much process-based as real.

In summary, if the NCRS is not returned to its core aims and scope and if the capability and capacity of the BCS is not boosted to provide context to recorded crime data, there is a continuing risk that judgements of policing performance and the operational and other decisions that flow from these will be prey to the vagaries of recording processes.

<sup>66</sup> Recorded violence against the person is made up of Home Office offence classes 1 – 8, 11 – 15, 37/1, 104 and 105.

<sup>67</sup> Theft of and from vehicles is included within the more general category of theft and handling stolen goods.

<sup>68</sup> Criminal damage is made up of Home Office offence classes 56, 58A to 58H, and 59.

<sup>69</sup> Recorded drug offences include trafficking in controlled drugs 92A; possession of controlled drugs 92B; and other drug offences 92C.

## **6. Criminalisation and perverse incentives caused by contradictory performance regimes.**

The national crime reduction target (PSA1) demands that police and partners should achieve a reduction in crime of 15 per cent by 2008 as measured by the BCS. In turn, the second leg of the PSA requires that the average reduction in the 40 'high crime' Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership areas should be greater than the average reduction in the remaining CDRP areas as measured by the recorded crime BCS Comparator. Counter-intuitively, it would be quite possible for both legs of this national target to be achieved while recorded crime actually increases and this is emblematic of the ambiguity and complexities inherent in the current approach to crime statistics which mediates uncertainly between two distinct modes of measurement.

Whilst recorded crime figures can be influenced by changes in policy they can also be affected by the use of specific police tactics or initiatives. Many police forces are working with partner agencies to encourage victims of domestic violence to report incidents so that it may be effectively tackled; likewise hate crime incident reporting is being extensively encouraged. Increased police presence in town centres has resulted, in a number of Forces and BCUs, in a rise in the number of recorded public order offences. Rather than this reflecting an actual rise in town centre violence it is probable that it is simply that the police are taking positive action to tackle existing problems and that they are using new tools (PNDs) extensively.

There are clearly links between recorded crime and other police performance measures. As has already been outlined this is particularly the case around violent crime. The continued use of the unrefined violence figures is likely to undermine the veracity and credibility of decision making in relation to performance management. Violent crime makes up a 21 per cent proportion of the 'all crime' figure and consequently any increase in violent crime is likely to impact disproportionately on the total figure. As highlighted the inclusion of some offence types are more likely to reflect police activity, tactics or initiatives. Such activity which results in tackling issues for example alcohol-related disorder is bound to create a perverse incentive within the service. Such a situation clearly does not serve the public interest.

The current usage of recorded crime figures in performance regimes can provide a disincentive to appropriately focus on some of those communities vulnerable to crime. It is widely accepted that domestic abuse is under reported, yet any successful reassurance campaign for victims of domestic abuse that leads to an increase in reporting will lead to the number of violent crimes reported increasing. That increase in recorded crime may reflect a standstill, or even a reduction, in terms of actual incidents. This will reflect in an increase in violent crime data and a Force's measured performance declining even though the trend reflects improved service delivery and citizen focus. This is also the case in relation to the treatment of victims of race and hate crimes as well as sex crimes such as rape.

The drive towards OBTJ targets currently does not embrace rehabilitative options. An offence can only be brought to justice if it results in a charge, caution, summons, or is Taken Into Consideration at Court. As such, rehabilitative approaches, including those around restorative justice, do not increase the measured performance of the police. The significant consequence of this is the criminalisation of members of the public who have perhaps committed a relatively minor transgression, or have behaved particularly unusually for them as an individual in offending. The pressure to deliver performance is such that operational officers will seek to turn incidents into a detection that counts as an OBTJ, rather than using their policing skills to informally warn, or direct suitable individuals towards rehabilitation.

A paper produced for the Youth Justice Board for England & Wales cited a recent example to illustrate how the drive for sanction detections has removed the discretionary element to policing and the common sense approach to restorative justice.

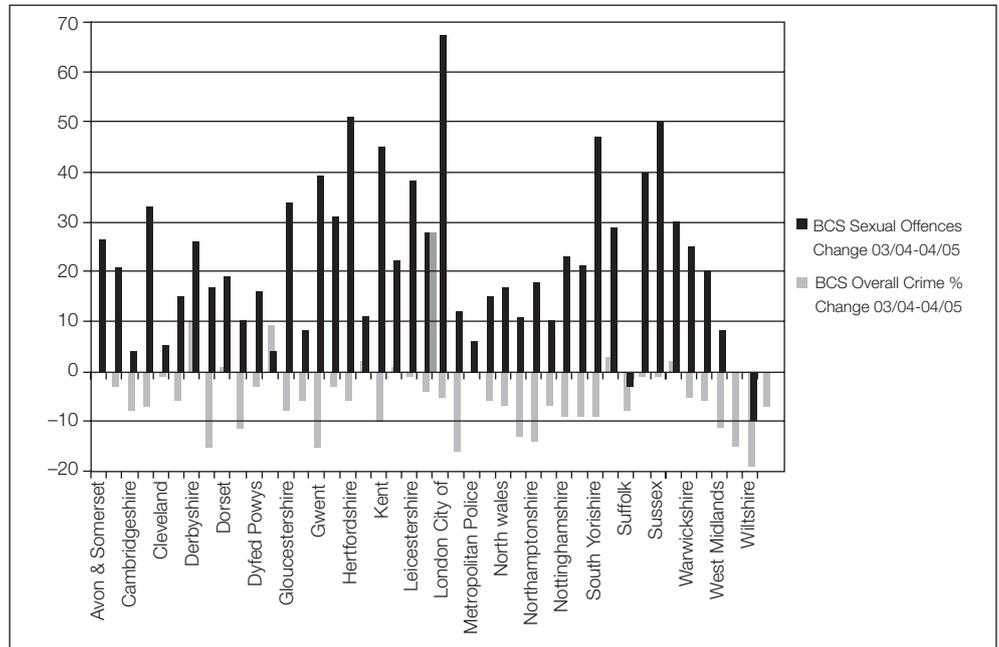
A mother, struggling to bring up a 12 year old daughter who was going through a difficult stage, found that she had taken some cash from her handbag. The mother called the police and asked if an officer could call round and help support the family by giving her daughter an informal 'talking to'. The officer who attended, conscious of the crime detection rules, felt that he had to arrest the daughter and process her through the formal system, contrary to what the mother wanted and totally contrary to what common sense dictated.

## **7. Will Neighbourhood Policing and Contact Management increase recorded crime?**

The level of trust between a specific local community and its Constabulary can impact on the number of crimes recorded. If a community trusts its police to be positive and active in dealing with reports of crime then there is more likelihood that crimes are reported. This is exemplified by BCS data in relation to levels of reporting of different crime types.

It is widely accepted there is a high level of under-reporting in relation to sexual offences. Many Forces have invested in community schemes to highlight this fact and to encourage the reporting of such offences. The police service as a whole has recognised the need to become much more victim focussed in this area in particular, acknowledging that some victims, whilst confident enough to report sexual offences are still not able to cope with the trauma of a prosecution and all that accompanies this process. This is demonstrated by the data below which show that the overall crime trend according to the BCS data is down, yet the trend in respect of sexual offences is greatly increased.

Figure 3: Percentage changes in BCS overall crime vs BCS sexual offences



With the move towards Neighbourhood Policing, and the potential deployment of 24,000 PCSOs into communities nationwide by 2008, it is possible that reporting and recording of crime will increase, although crime may actually be reducing.

Another significant influence is call handling capability and service accessibility as described in the recent HMIC report 'First Contact'. Some Forces now, following the recommendations of a number of high level reports such as 'On the Record', and the results of HMIC Inspections, as well as a desire to deliver a better service, have invested significantly in their call handling capabilities. 'First Contact' is likely to increase that investment. The call handling performance and policy application of Forces, coupled with the emergence of SNEN, will influence the levels of reporting of crime.

The increased access to the service, afforded by SNEN, is strongly supported by ACPO who acknowledge its direct relevance to PSA2 (reassuring the public, reducing fear of crime and anti-social behaviour). However, alongside enhanced access there exists the strong likelihood of increased reporting of crimes such as criminal damage and violent crime, most commonly minor disorder offences. These will need to be recorded and investigated in accordance with NCRS.

Such reporting is welcomed in the context of problem analysis and follow up preventative interagency action, but in the short term does provide an additional capacity problem for the police, to both record and investigate such crimes in accordance with NCRS and Victims Code standards. Unfortunately the nature of such crimes is often that subsequent detection is problematic, so whilst the number

of recorded crimes increases the proportionate detection rate decreases. The risk associated with this is that any anticipated increases in public perceptions of confidence and police effectiveness may be undermined at both national and local levels.

The reporting requirements of other organisations clearly have a direct impact on levels of recorded crime. For instance, some Local Authorities require a crime number to be issued before they will contemplate doing any repairs that are in relation to damage. Thus, significant numbers of incidents are recorded by the Police as crimes to fulfil the need of the member of the public to have a crime number before work will be carried out to repair the damage. It is notable that trends in areas such as burglary appear very similar in BCS data and NCRS data. This is likely to reflect the lack of under reporting in this particular area rather than anything else.

## **8. Recorded Crime Data should include that of non Home Office Forces.**

Crimes recorded by the British Transport Police, Ministry of Defence Police and the Civil Nuclear Police are not currently reflected in national crime statistics.

It is a matter of record that MDP crime statistics have been included in the overall picture for Scotland for some time. Thus, for the purposes of consistency, it would also be appropriate for MDP statistics to be included in the overall position.

If we are to move towards a better understanding of 'real' crime rather than reported crime, there is an argument that any agency or body charged with recording crime, should report their statistics for inclusion in the national picture.

## **Recommendations**

1. A full review of the notifiable offence list should be undertaken.
2. A full review of potential methods to reach a proportionate and consistent method for crime recording should be commenced. This should be victim focussed to cater for lower level or minor offences without loss of investigative incentive, yet cognizant of other recording methods which offer a more efficient and cost effective tool in the collection of 'patterns' for tactical police and partnership problem solving methods.
3. Include other bodies/agencies crimes or incidents within national statistics to maximise the accuracy of factual data, whilst accepting it will always be a subset of actual crime as it is reliant on reporting levels.
4. Continue to use the BCS as a good indicator of trends and enhance its value to local tactical decision makers by providing greater granularity at BCU/CDRP level.

5. Consider using an enhanced BCS as a validation tool in respect of police-recorded data and NCRS compliance.
6. A full review of PPAF methodology to reflect true performance against a more accurate measure of crime and crime trends.

