

New survey on the population's experience of crime during the COVID-19 pandemic: Update for users of statistics – 5th August 2020

This document updates users of Scottish Government crime and justice statistics on i. the ongoing suspension of the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey and ii. our plans for a new survey of the population on crime victimisation and feelings of safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. What are the latest developments with the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey?

The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) is our established source of information on people's experiences and perceptions of crime, policing and the justice system in Scotland; based on around 5,500 face-to-face interviews with adults aged 16 and over in private households. Latest [SCJS results for the 2018/19 survey year](#) were published on the 16th June.

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, all Scottish Government face-to-face interviewing, including the SCJS, has been suspended since the 17th March 2020.

Whilst the suspension came before the end of the 2019/20 fieldwork year (due to run April 2019 – April 2020), it is likely SCJS results of comparable quality to earlier years can still be produced (due in March 2021). The 2020/21 fieldwork year has not started and given the length of suspension, it is now highly likely we will not be able to produce results for this year.

2. What impact does the SCJS suspension have on Scotland's crime statistics?

The ongoing suspension of the SCJS opens up an evidence gap on the extent and prevalence of crime in Scotland during the period covered by the pandemic, with particular challenges for assessing crimes not reported to the police (a majority of all crimes), where other sources cannot provide an alternative.

To meet this challenge, we plan to run a new survey in early autumn, using telephone-based interviews, on the population's experience of crime and feelings of safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. What topics will the new survey cover and why have they been chosen?

As the main focus of the new survey is to collect evidence on the extent and prevalence of crime in Scotland (including on crimes not reported to the police) the majority of questions will ask interviewees about their experience

of crime. By collecting this information we may be able to answer questions on whether the pandemic has affected the level of crime committed in Scotland in similar ways to police recorded crime (for which we now produce [monthly Official Statistics bulletins](#)).

We plan to use the remaining time in the survey to ask respondents about their feelings of safety within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as gather information necessary to identify and correctly categorise any crimes experienced. Questions will also be asked that allow us to produce results which will be representative of the population as a whole and give an opportunity for some analytical breakdowns (for example, experiences of crime or feelings of safety by gender).

Taken together, these topics account for the 20 minute interview time.

The questions usually asked in the self-completion section of the SCJS (on drug use, stalking and harassment, partner abuse and sexual victimisation) are not suitable for inclusion in this type of survey and so will not be included. For example, it could be problematic for someone to attempt to answer such questions in private if living with an abusive partner.

4. Is this new survey just the SCJS but moved to telephone interviews rather than face-to-face?

No. Whilst the new survey will cover similar topics to the SCJS, there are some key differences, outlined below, which mean results will not be comparable to the SCJS.

- Mode effects: People's answers to survey questions may differ depending on the way the survey is carried out. Asking questions by telephone, rather than face-to-face (as per the SCJS), may introduce some artificial differences to the data. At present, telephone interviewing represents the best available alternative to the suspended SCJS. For example, interviewing people online would require the development and testing of systems which will take more time than setting up interviews by phone.
- Sampling method: The new survey will recontact earlier SCJS respondents who provided their phone number and consented to take part in further research, whereas the SCJS uses random selection from the Royal Mail's postcode address file to identify households for interview. Whilst data will be weighted to be nationally representative of all private residential households, the sampling method may produce some differences. This replicates the approach adopted by the Crime Survey for England & Wales, and may allow for UK country comparisons.
- Sample size: The new survey aims to achieve around 3,000 interviews over 5 weeks (during September-October 2020), compared to around

5,500 SCJS interviews across 12 months. As such we anticipate the smaller sample size will lead to fewer respondents reporting that they have experienced crime during the previous 12 months. In comparison to the SCJS, we will therefore have a more limited ability to produce detailed breakdowns on the characteristics of crime (for example the location or details of the offender). This could be a particular factor when isolating the COVID-19 lockdown period within the data (which is significantly less than 12 months). The smaller sample size will also reduce the precision of the estimates.

- Questionnaire length: The new survey will be around 20 minutes in length to encourage participation by telephone and minimise participant burden. The SCJS is typically 40 minutes in length. Due to this shorter interview time, a smaller number of questions will be asked.

5. When will the findings of this survey be published?

We anticipate that findings from the survey will be available in early 2021, and will keep users informed on our progress with this exercise. Alongside a summary report, data will be made available through the UK Data Service.

We will also be considering opportunities for examining repeat victimisation through longitudinal analysis linking data from respondents' earlier SCJS interview. As some respondents will have participated in the 2019/20 fieldwork year, any results will be made available following the publication of the 2019/20 SCJS in March 2021.

6. Is the survey a one-off or do you plan to ask further questions?

At the moment there are no plans to carry out another wave of the survey. However, depending on the success of the first wave, the length of the SCJS suspension and the analytical resources available, we may decide in future that it would be beneficial to conduct a second follow-up survey by phone. Should this happen we will inform users of our plans and invite feedback on the potential content of a second survey.

7. How can I provide any feedback on this project or receive updates on its progress?

If you have any feedback or further questions about the survey, please get in touch with the SCJS team at SCJS@gov.scot.

Users will be kept updated through ScotStat communications, including on any plans for a second follow-up survey if the decision is taken to proceed. You can sign up to receive ScotStat updates via the [ScotStat website](#).