
Analytical Services Group

Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey: Assessment of the feasibility to include children aged 10 to 15 and communal establishments

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BACKGROUND

The Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey (NISCS) (formerly known as the Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS)) is a representative, continuous, personal interview survey in which people aged 16 and over living in private households in Northern Ireland are asked about their experiences of crime in the 12 months prior to interview as well as their perceptions of crime-related issues, including policing and justice, crime and anti-social behaviour. Self-completion modules are also used to elicit information on sensitive topics, such as domestic abuse. Previously conducted on an ad hoc basis in 1994/95, 1998, 2001 and 2003/04, the then NICS began operating on a continuous basis in January 2005. Its results play an important role in informing and monitoring government policies and targets, including Indicator 1 contained within the [Draft 2016-21 Programme for Government](#) (PfG) and the [Northern Ireland Civil Service Outcomes Delivery Plan](#).

In recent years, increasing financial pressures and the requirement to make mandatory efficiency savings led to a review of NICS expenditure as the funding level required could no longer be sustained. After considering the cost saving options available, it was decided to retain a continuous survey with a reduced target sample size. A moderate decrease to the target achieved sample size was first made in-year 2013/14, from 4,000 to 3,500, with the full sample reduction to 2,000 first being implemented in NICS 2014/15 (see paper '[Change to Northern Ireland Crime Survey \(NICS\) sample size](#)'). However, following feedback from the Draft Programme for Government 2016-2021 consultation and the more [recent review of the then Northern Ireland Crime Survey in 2017/18](#), the target sample size has again been increased. It is anticipated that approximately 3,500 interviews will now be achieved annually with effect from April 2018 onwards.

While the survey seeks the views and experiences of those aged 16 and over, recently there has been increasing interest in eliciting estimates of victimisation and views of children. This was identified primarily through the Draft Programme for Government consultation and the Crime Survey review. The main purpose of this paper is to outline the options considered for measuring victimisation among children, including the extension of the current NISCS and a number of alternative options, namely:

- the inclusion of questions within the Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitude Survey;
- the inclusion of questions within the Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey; and
- the development of a new child specific victimisation survey.

The paper will also present findings on the feasibility of extending the NISCS to include communal establishments.

MEASURING VICTIMISATION AND PERCEPTIONS AMONG CHILDREN AGED 10 to 15 YEARS OLD

Extension of the Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey

One of the main options considered for estimating victimisation levels among children was the extension of the current NISCS to include 10 to 15 year olds, similar to the [Crime Survey](#)

[for England and Wales \(CSEW\)](#) (formerly known as the British Crime Survey (BCS)). Following a report ([Pickering et al., 2008](#)) which examined the feasibility of extending the then BCS to include children, the survey began measuring victimisation levels among children of this age group from January 2009, through a separate child questionnaire. In this feasibility report, it was concluded that children under 10 years should not be included in the sample. Children of this age were considered less likely to have the appropriate cognitive skills and the non-coverage of this group was likely to have only a marginal impact on victimisation estimates for those aged under 16.

When undertaking scoping work with regards to the potential extension of the Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey, two options, that were considered as part of the BCS scoping paper, are also considered here:

- 1. Option 1:** interview one child aged 10 to 15 in responding NISCS households using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) (as per the current CSEW method); and
- 2. Option 2:** interview all children aged 10 to 15 in responding NISCS households using a self-completion paper-based questionnaire.

Both options are presented below in terms of the potential sample size that could be achieved, data quality and impact on cost.

1. Option 1: Interview one child aged 10 to 15 in responding NISCS households using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI)

Using this method, a sole child aged 10 to 15 years would be selected at random for interview in responding NISCS households (where applicable). No substitutes would be permitted. The interview would ideally be conducted upon completion of the adult survey. However, if the child is not present at that time then a suitable time would be arranged for a further visit to interview the child. As is current practice with the adult questionnaire, responses would be collected using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI), whereby the interviewer would record the child's responses to the questionnaire on a tablet. With this method there is the potential to cover more sensitive topics as the child could complete such modules on the tablet by themselves (Computer-Assisted Self Interviewing, CASI) and, when finished, their answers would be hidden. This allows respondents to feel more at ease when answering sensitive questions due to increased confidence in the privacy and confidentiality of the survey.

Sample size: Data from the last five years of the NISCS have been used to inform the potential sample size of children aged 10 to 15. Table 1 (Annex A) shows the percentage of responding NICS/NISCS households containing a child(ren) under 16 years old and the total number of children in these households for each of the 2014/15, 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 surveys. Figures are also presented for 2018/19, the first year with the increased sample size.

The figures show, over the five sweeps of the survey, around 30% of NISCS households contained at least one child under 16. While the specific ages of the children are not collected, the potential sample size of 10 to 15 year olds was estimated using mid-year

population estimates. Assuming a similar adult sample to that in 2018/19 would be achieved for future years, the potential sample of 10 to 15 year olds is estimated at approximately 400. It is unlikely, however, that a 100% response rate would be achieved thus reducing the potential sample size further. These figures suggest that the overall anticipated adult sample size of 3,500 annually would not achieve a sufficient number of child interviews to generate robust analyses, at either the Northern Ireland headline or sub-population level.

Data quality: Administering a survey using CAPI would allow increased questionnaire flexibility and consistency checks to be incorporated to improve data quality. Automatic routing enables respondents to be guided accurately through the questionnaire based on previous responses thus preventing respondents from skipping questions accidentally. It reduces the amount of missing data and response error compared with a paper questionnaire and enables more complex questionnaires/routing to be facilitated.

Cost: While selecting one child from responding NISCS households is beneficial in terms of fieldwork efficiency, conducting an interview with a child consecutively to the adult questionnaire using CAPI increases fieldwork costs. This is primarily due to interviewer time which is the main component of survey expenditure. It also increases the time burden placed on respondents. It is for these reasons that the limit of one child interview per responding household is set in CSEW.

Assuming a similar completion time to the CSEW child questionnaire (approximately 15-20 minutes), it is estimated that extending the survey to gain an interview with one child in responding households containing children aged 10-15 would incur an additional cost of approximately £30,000-£40,000 per annum. If repeat visits are made, this cost would increase further.

2. Option 2: Interview all children aged 10 to 15 in responding NISCS households using a self-completion paper-based questionnaire

Through this method, a child or multiple children aged 10 to 15 in the NISCS household would complete a paper questionnaire(s) simultaneously to the interviewer conducting the adult questionnaire. Using a paper-based method means all children of this age range in the household could potentially complete the survey while minimising the additional time burden that sequential interviews using CAPI would have. Given the sensitive nature of the questions, it would require the questionnaire to be completed in the presence of an interviewer and taken away immediately. Therefore, should the child(ren) not be present at the time of the adult interview, arrangements to complete the questionnaires at a later date would be made. This method could make the interviewer task more complex in terms of conducting the adult interviewer-led CAPI survey whilst simultaneously dealing with potential queries from children.

Sample size: Table 1 also gives an estimate of the total number of children in responding NISCS households for each of the surveys from 2014/15 to 2018/19. This shows that in 2018/19, with the increased sample size, there was less than 2,000 children in total aged under 16. Again, using mid-year population estimates, the total number of these children aged 10 to 15, and thus potential sample, is estimated at approximately 700. An unlikely

100% response rate would further reduce this estimate. While this method produces a higher potential sample than Option 1, it is still not considered sufficient to produce robust results and meaningful analyses at headline or sub-population level.

Data quality: The completion of the survey via a paper questionnaire would not produce the same level of data quality achieved with CAPI due to an increased risk of missing data, routing errors and a reduction in the consistency of responses provided. Paper questionnaires also reduce flexibility in terms of questionnaire adjustments and the complexity of the questionnaire/routing that could be used.

Cost: While administering a paper questionnaire simultaneously to the adult questionnaire may result in a minimum increase in interviewer time and associated costs, it would, however, require additional administrative resources to manually code and quality assure paper-based responses. While the nature of these costs incurred are different from those in Option 1, Option 2 is also estimated to cost around an additional £30,000-£40,000 per annum.

Following consideration of both options and associated factors, it has been concluded that it would not be feasible to extend the current Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey to include children aged 10 to 15. It is considered that neither option would generate a sufficient number of child interviews to provide robust estimates, at either the Northern Ireland headline level or when disaggregated by sub-population group. Detecting statistically significant change would prove difficult and confidence intervals would be too wide to produce meaningful analyses. The low sample size could also increase the variability of victimisation estimates between survey years impacting on the ability to measure trends consistently.

Both options would also lead to a rise in cost in the region of £30,000-£40,000 per year. These costs would be in addition to the increased expenditure incurred to boost the main sample from 2,000 annually which took effect from 2018/19 onwards. The cost of the main adult survey is currently around £390,000 annually. Given the limitations any resulting data would have and the scale of the additional costs involved, it would not represent value for money to extend the current survey.

While these options have been considered in the context of sample size, data quality and cost, additional factors, such as ethical procedures and parental consent, would need to be addressed also, should the potential arise to extend the current NISCS to include children in the future.

Alternative Options

(1) Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey

NISRA CSU is commissioned by a consortium of departments to design and conduct the [Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey](#) (YPBAS). Carried out among 11-16 year olds, YPBAS is a school-based survey which covers a range of topics and aims to gain an insight into the behaviour and attitudes of young people in Northern Ireland. The survey has

previously been conducted every three years (approximately), in the autumn of 2000, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2013 and again in 2016. The next sweep of the survey will be undertaken in autumn 2019.

A representative sample of schools is selected from a list held by the Department of Education. Details of the number of classes in Years 8-12 are provided and a class from each of the five year groups is then randomly selected to take part. Selected pupils are assembled in class-sized groups to complete the questionnaire on tablets set up in advance by CSU interviewers and staff. Interviewers remain with the pupils throughout the data collection period to assist with any technical queries they may have.

In 2016, a sample of 182 schools was drawn with 73 agreeing to participate (40.1%). In total, 6,831 pupils aged 11-16 took part in the survey. In 2007, 2010, 2013 and 2016, two versions of the questionnaire were used to accommodate demand for questions. The survey asked young people about a range of subject matter. While topics covered can vary between sweeps, the 2016 survey included questions on employment, nutrition, arts, sign language, care in the sun, road safety, public transport, smoking, alcohol and attitudes towards domestic violence.

While YPBAS has previously included questions related to personal safety, the feasibility of using the NISCS method of measuring the risk of victimisation was considered. Using the NISCS format, pupils would answer a set of screener questions to determine if they have been a victim of crime. Following the screener questions, pupils who have been victimised would then complete a victim form which asks detailed questions about exactly what happened. A separate victim form would be completed for each separate incident, up to a maximum of three victim forms (as per the child interview in CSEW). Adopting this method, however, would raise a number of issues.

The Office for National Statistics commissioned Kantar Public to assess the feasibility of collecting CSEW data via an online questionnaire. A report was published which presented findings from the study ([Re-Design of Crime Survey for England and Wales \(CSEW\) Core Questions for Online Collection: A report on the scoping and testing phase](#)). The report raised the difficulties experienced by some respondents in completing the victim form element of the questionnaire, particularly in cases of multiple or repeat victimisation. According to the report:

'In order to disentangle the exact circumstances of crimes experienced, these respondents were faced with a complex series of check questions and validation screens which many found cognitively challenging'.

Pupils participating in YPBAS would effectively be self-completing the questionnaire. Taking account of the findings from the above report, it could therefore be expected that some pupils would experience the same difficulties completing the module should the screener question/victim form method be used. Furthermore, the time taken by pupils to respond to the module could vary depending on the number of victims forms completed (if any). This variation in completion time would not only impact on the administration of the survey as a whole, a prolonged interview could also potentially identify a pupil as having been a victim of crime within the school environment.

Therefore it has been concluded that YPBAS would not be a suitable vehicle for measuring victimisation levels among children using the screener question/victim form methodology. However, in order to gauge victimisation levels and perceptions of/worry about crime among this age group, a shorter module has been developed and will be piloted in the 2019 survey.

(2) Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey

The [Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey](#) (NI YLT) is an annual survey which provides young people with the opportunity to give their views on a range of subjects including politics, sectarianism and their experiences of school. From 1998 to 2000 the survey sought views from all 12 to 17 year olds living in households responding to the adult [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey](#). However, following a review of the YLT in 2001, the aim and methodology subsequently changed. As a result, from 2003, the survey only sought attitudes of young people aged 16. A similar survey, the [Kids' Life and Times Survey](#), is conducted annually among all Primary 7 children in Northern Ireland and has regularly asked similar questions to the YLT. However, given the limitations of the age range covered in both surveys, it is considered that data collected through these surveys would not provide a representative picture of victimisation among children in general.

(3) Development of a new child specific victimisation survey

The development of a separate, child specific victimisation survey is not considered a viable option for DoJ. This is primarily due to the financial and staffing resources required, in relation to both the initial development and set-up phase and, once established, the ongoing fieldwork, administration and analyses of data.

Additional factors, such as the absence of a sampling frame of children, survey methodology, parental consent and any ethical issues, would also need to be considered. However, as this is not considered a feasible option for DoJ, these factors have not been developed further in this paper.

EXTENSION OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND SAFE COMMUNITY SURVEY TO COVER THOSE LIVING IN COMMUNAL ESTABLISHMENTS

Similar to other main government surveys, the Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey does not cover those living in communal establishments. When assessing the potential of extending the current survey, consideration of a number of factors shows it would not represent value for money to widen the scope to include communal establishments.

Communal establishments are excluded from the Crime Survey for England and Wales. Within the same [report](#) which assessed the potential of extending the CSEW to include children, the exclusion of communal establishments was also addressed to determine if this was still justified. The paper reported that the 2001 Census estimated 2.1% of the population in England and Wales aged 16 and over lived in communal establishments, therefore the CSEW covered 97.9% of the population as a whole. It was concluded that "*it is*

most unlikely that this non-coverage bias will be significant relative to other potential sources of bias such as measurement error and non-response” and the inclusion of communal establishments would have little impact on the overall victimisation prevalence rates estimated from the survey. While acknowledging, in theory, a sampling frame could be compiled, the substantial resource investment that would be required to do so was highlighted. Communal establishments continue to be excluded from CSEW.

Figures from the 2011 Census show that an even lower proportion of the population aged 16 and over, including staff and their families, were living in communal establishments in Northern Ireland (22,172; 1.5%). The survey therefore covers 98.5% of the general population aged 16 and over. There is currently no sampling frame covering all communal establishments in Northern Ireland from which a sample could be derived and to compile one would involve a lengthy, resource intensive process. Given this would result in a substantial increase in cost but is likely to have a minimal effect on victimisation rates, it has been decided not to extend the survey to include communal establishments.

CONCLUSION

The paper presents a number of options that were considered for estimating victimisation among children in Northern Ireland. The limitations of the potential sample size that would be generated through the Safe Community Survey and the age ranges covered in both the Kids and Young Life and Times Surveys mean these would not be viable options for measuring children’s experiences of crime. A short module, however, has been included within the 2019 Young Persons’ Behaviour and Attitudes Survey, to gauge victimisation among children. Going forward, however, the measurement of child victimisation estimates will depend on a number of factors including, availability in any future YPBAS surveys, financial funding and whether any alternative options for estimating victimisation levels among children arise in the interim.

ANNEX A

Table 1: Potential sample size of children aged 10 to 15 year olds from the Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey

	NICS 2014/15	NICS 2015/16	NICS 2016/17	NICS 2017/18	NISCS 2018/19
Total achieved sample size	2,074	1,975	1,877	1,582	3,429
Percentage of NICS/NISCS households with children under 16	29.7	31.0	29.2	29.5	30.0
Number of NICS/NISCS households with children under 16	617	612	549	467	1,027
Total number of children aged under 16 in NICS/NISCS households	1,176	1,104	994	846	1,894
Percentage of the population aged 10 to 15 as a proportion of those aged 0 to 15¹	35.5	35.1	35.0	35.4	36.3
Option 1 - Selecting one child aged 10 to 15 from NICS/NISCS households with children	219	215	192	165	372
Option 2 - Selecting all children aged 10 to 15 within NICS/NISCS households	417	387	348	300	687

1. Calculated using the respective mid-year population estimates which can be accessed from [NISRA](#) website.

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