

Sir Michael Scholar KCB
UK Statistics Authority
Statistics House
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16 February 2010

Dear Sir Michael

Violent crime statistics

As you are perhaps aware, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) has engaged in the recent media debate about the interpretation and accuracy of recorded crime statistics; in the blog on 3 February by Mark Easton, the BBC's Home Editor, he quoted from comments by CSJ Senior Policy Specialist Christian Guy.

The CSJ's independent criminal justice work, which has included both official and anecdotal consideration of violent crime levels, has sought to make clear the link between social breakdown and the crime it fuels. Our analysis and recommendations are rooted in a recognition that it is people living in our poorest communities who are impacted most acutely by criminal behaviour on a daily basis. We have also recognised how it is from such communities that a disproportionate number of offenders are drawn. Therefore, in view of our high-profile work in this field and our commitment to statistical integrity, as well as the recent confusion about the use of official crime statistics, I would be grateful for your formal confirmation as to how one should best use the available data, given the well-documented difficulties.

Looking first at the issue which triggered the recent media interest, that is the political use of recorded violent crime statistics, I would welcome your direction on the appropriate qualification to employ when referring to the change in the way that statistics were collected from 2002-3 onwards.

In 2003 the Home Office assessment of the effect of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) on crime recorded in 2002-03 concluded that the impact on violent crime – violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery – was to increase it by 20 per cent (Home Office, *The National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS): An analysis of the impact on recorded crime, Companion Volume to Crime in England and Wales 2002/2003*, July 2003).

Is the 20 per cent inflation rate outlined in the 2003 evaluation still applicable?

If it remains the accurate numerical caveat, given that between 2001/02 and 2002/03, recorded violent crimes increased from 821,266 to 1,014,239, a numerical increase of 23 per cent (Home Office, *Crime in England and Wales 2008-9*, 22 October 2009, Revised Table 2.04), would it be correct to conclude the real increase in violent crime in 2002-03 was 2.9 per cent (adjusting for the NCRS impact as outlined in the 2003 evaluation)?

Furthermore, there were 615,985 violent crimes recorded by police in 1998-99 and 1,034,972 recorded in 2008-09. Directly comparing these two figures gives an increase of 68 per cent (Home Office, *Crime in England and Wales 2008-9*, 22 October 2009, Revised Table 2.04). On the rationale outlined above, would it be accurate to conclude recorded violent crime has increased by 40 per cent in real terms?

I would also like to take this opportunity, again for the purposes of ensuring full clarity in the CSJ's future policy work, to ask about recorded and estimated trends in Britain's most deprived communities.

I would appreciate your comments on whether you consider the British Crime Survey (BCS) a useful indicator of crime or crime trends in deprived communities. There are a number of particular points to consider. First, would you agree there is a lack of engagement with surveys from those in our poorest communities? Secondly, does the exclusion of people living in irregular housing have a significant impact on the BCS as a crime indicator for deprived areas? Thirdly, do you agree that the cap on the number of incidents at only five crimes per household under-reports crime in such areas where victimisation rates are comparatively higher than elsewhere? If there was a rise in crime in deprived communities (but for the above reasons not properly tracked) would this make the overall national figures less reliable?

And finally in reference to police recorded crime, would you agree that national levels of recorded crime are somewhat distorted by a lack of reporting in deprived communities (caused in part by a lack of trust between residents and police officers)?

I hope you will be able to offer clear guidance in the near future to ensure the CSJ continues to use and comment on official crime statistics in an accurate and appropriate manner.

Yours sincerely



Philippa Stroud
Executive Director