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Measuring cybercrime in England and Wales: October 2020

Centre for Crime and Justice

30 October 2020

Overview

- Measuring cybercrime in the **Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)**

- Response to the **coronavirus pandemic** and the Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW)

- Future work: **challenges and opportunities**

How is the CSEW conducted?

- The CSEW is a **randomly selected cross-sectional survey** representing England and Wales and is conducted by face-to-face interviews in people's own homes using trained interviewers and a structured questionnaire

- The current target sample size for the CSEW survey is **35,000 interviews** with adults aged 16 and over living in private households (and an additional 3,000 interviews with 10-15 yr olds) every year

- The CSEW first took place in 1982 and measures **experience of crime in the past 12 months**, as well as additional topics such as perceptions of crime and drug misuse
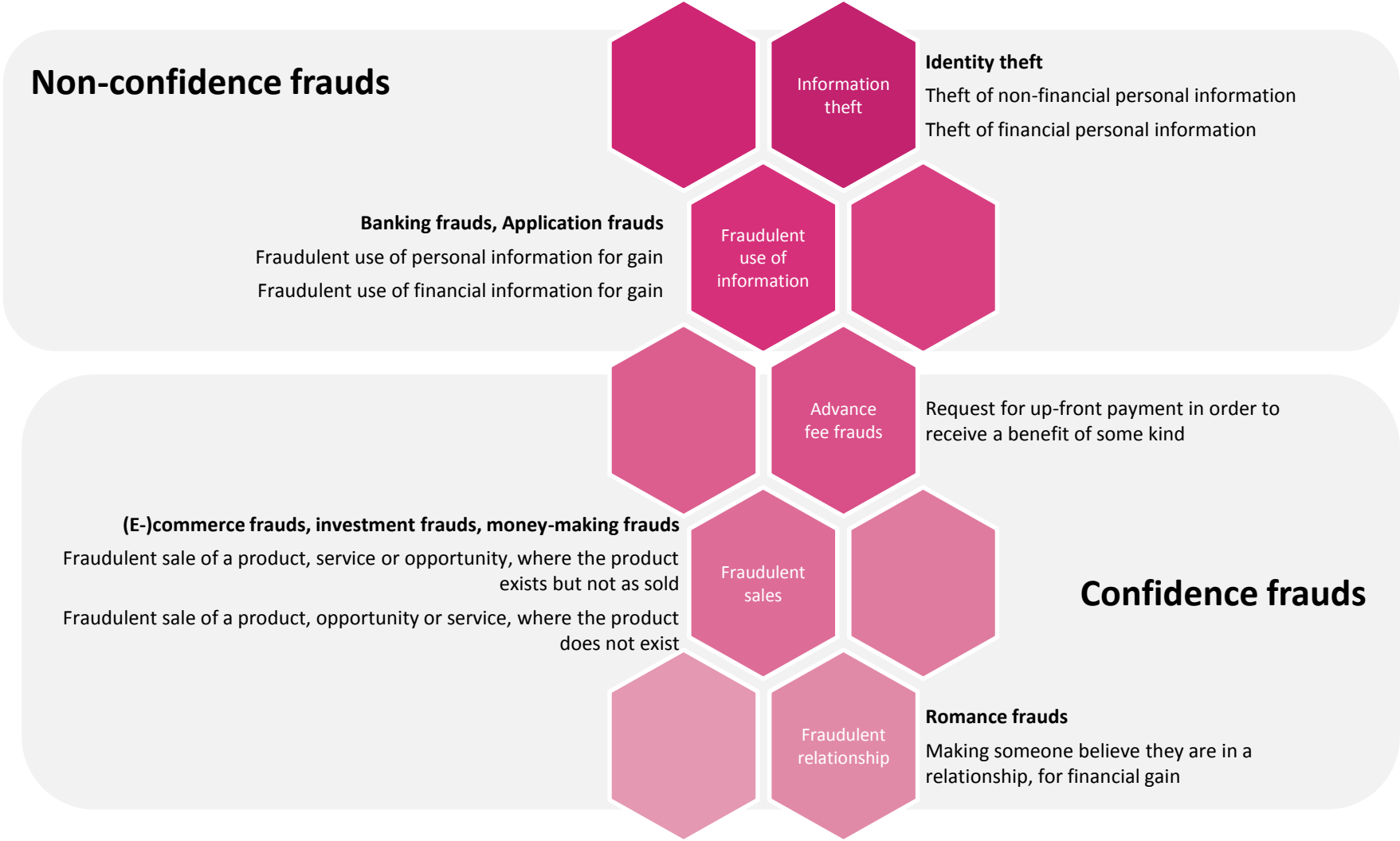
Measuring cybercrime in CSEW

2011: The National Statistician's independent review recognised the **need for improved measurement of fraud and cybercrime**

2014: ONS established a project to explore the **feasibility** of covering fraud and cyber crime in CSEW

2016: First **CSEW estimates of fraud and computer misuse** published after new questions introduced in October 2015

2018: Fraud and computer misuse estimates classified as **National Statistics**

Thinking about classification

Non-confidence frauds

Identity theft

Theft of non-financial personal information

Theft of financial personal information

Information theft

Banking frauds, Application frauds

Fraudulent use of personal information for gain

Fraudulent use of financial information for gain

Fraudulent use of information

Advance fee frauds

Request for up-front payment in order to receive a benefit of some kind

(E-)commerce frauds, investment frauds, money-making frauds

Fraudulent sale of a product, service or opportunity, where the product exists but not as sold

Fraudulent sale of a product, opportunity or service, where the product does not exist

Fraudulent sales

Confidence frauds

Fraudulent relationship

Romance frauds

Making someone believe they are in a relationship, for financial gain

Key questionnaire development challenges

- CSEW classification mimics Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR) for police recorded crime….as far as possible but **some differences e.g. who is the victim and how many victims**

- Victims of fraud/cybercrime did not generally know when the crime occurred and only knew when they had identified the incident. **Move to recording against when the victim came to know of the fraud and cybercrime**

- Existing victim form asks whether the incident took place in England and Wales. **Decision not to distinguish where incident took place for incidents of fraud and cybercrime**

CSEW statistics on fraud and cybercrime

The new statistics on fraud and computer misuse provide data on four major fraud categories:
- **bank and credit account fraud**
- **advance fee fraud**
- **consumer and retail fraud**
- **other fraud – this includes investment fraud and charity fraud**

Data are also provided on two offences covered by the Computer Misuse Act:
- **unauthorised access to personal information (including hacking)**
- **computer viruses**

AND **added cyber flag** to all offences

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2020 Fraud and computer misuse statistics

For the year ending March 2020:

- 3.7 million incidents of fraud

- **53% of fraud incidents were flagged as cybercrime**

- Only 14% of fraud incidents reported to the police

- 0.9 million incidents of computer misuse

Nature of fraud and computer misuse:

- Impact on victim, method/reason of contact, financial loss, satisfaction with reporting body response, experience with viruses, security measures etc.

Further cybercrime question development

- The most recent round of questionnaire development in 2019 focused on **identifying fraud offences that are facilitated by a computer misuse offence** (e.g. someone personal details are hacked, and information gained by the fraudster enables them to access the victim's bank account).

- The experimental questions were tested through a cognitive testing exercise ahead of the April 2020 questionnaire launch **BUT**….

Coronavirus pandemic and national survey

- Government household surveys **suspend interviewing on 18 March 2020**

- CSEW year to March 2020 dataset **largely unaffected** by suspension and lockdown restrictions associated with the pandemic

  - *Response rates were slightly short of the 70% target (67%) and the number of interviews just short of the 34,500 requirement*

- COVID-19 ONS Social Surveys; **operational adjustments should be made to support continuation of running surveys**, including provisions for the Crime Survey for England and Wales. At this time there had been no discussion as to what any alternative would look like.

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Setting up the telephone-operated crime survey

- **TCSEW survey went live on the 20th May** – 9 weeks to day fieldwork was suspended

- Sample options: different options considered e.g. random digital dialling, address based online survey, **recontact crime survey respondents**

- **TCSEW Sample**: crime survey respondents who had taken part in the crime survey in the last two years

- **Panel design** with the aim to maximise the sample; three waves at three monthly intervals until March 2021

- Weights calculated to account for sample design and non-response

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TCSEW Questionnaire

- Construct a shortened CSEW questionnaire suitable for telephone interviewing. The questionnaire includes

- (i) **Screener module** (same as in CSEW)

- (ii) **Victim Forms** (using a redesigned, shorter version for coding – plus victim perpetrator relationship),

- (iii) **New module** covering concerns about crime in a Covid-19 context

- (iv) **Demographic module**

Many modules in the crime survey were removed due to time constraints e.g. security and prevention

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TCSEW fraud and computer misuse estimates for year ending June 2020

In the last 12 months:

- **4.3 million fraud offences and 1.6 million computer misuse offences**

> **!** Unable to make direct comparisons with face-to-face crime survey estimates…..but estimates lay within the range of those reported in recent years.

April to June 2020:

- **No significant change** in fraud and computer misuse incidence or prevalence estimates compared to the January to March 2020

Challenges during the pandemic

- **Mode effects**; impact of moving to telephone interviewing on estimates and comparability over time

- **Uncertainty**; smaller sample size leading to more uncertainty in our estimates

- **Accounting for survey design**; more complex weights needed to account for sample design and wave structure

- **Measuring short-term change**; comparing the number of victims and incidents across time within TCSEW is challenging – recall bias, smaller sample sizes, shorter time-frame for data processing and analysis

- **User need**; need for flexibility in data collection and analysis to meet user need

Future work on cybercrime

- TCSEW data; understanding impact of coronavirus pandemic on cybercrime – **planned publication on nature of fraud and computer misuse during the pandemic**

- Continued development of survey questions to better capture cyber-enabled fraud and the evolving nature of these crimes and matching **future updates to Home Office Counting Rules for recording crime** where possible

- Continue to work with our partners on how we can better compliment our survey data with **data from reporting bodies** to understand the nature of these offences

- **Child cyber crime findings to be published in February 2021**; estimates of the prevalence and nature of online activity among children including speaking to strangers, sending and receiving images and online security using data from the 10 to 15-year-old's Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

Recent publications on ons.gov.uk

- Nature of fraud and computer misuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2019

- Coronavirus and crime in England and Wales: August 2020

- Crime in England and Wales: year ending June 2020

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