

Compendium

# Chapter 1: Perceptions of the Police

Crime statistics from the Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime.



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# 1 . Summary

## Summary

Since it began in 1981, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) has asked the public a range of questions about their perceptions of the police. This chapter presents analyses on this topic from the 2013/14 survey, and on victim satisfaction with how the police handled the incident. Key findings include:

- The proportion of adults who gave the local police a positive rating (said they did a good or excellent job) was 63% in 2013/14. This represents a small increase from the 2012/13 figure (61%) and is similar to the 2011/12 figure (62%). While not directly comparable, prior to this, the proportion of adults who gave the local police a positive rating increased from 47% in 2003/04 to 59% in 2010/11
- The proportion of adults who (tended to or strongly) agreed with, overall, having confidence in the local police, was 76% in 2013/14. This represents a small increase from the 2012/13 and the 2011/12 figures (74% and 75%). While not directly comparable, prior to this, the proportion rose from 63% in 2005/06 to 72% in 2010/11
- The proportion of adults who reported seeing police officers or police community support officers (PCSOs) on foot patrol in their local area about once a week or more (high police visibility) was 32% in 2013/14. This continued the downward trend seen since 2010/11 when reported levels of high police visibility were at their peak (39%). Before this, the proportion of adults reporting high visibility rose from 26% in 2006/07
- High police visibility was associated with positive ratings of the police. For adults who reported high police visibility, 71% gave the local police a positive rating. This compares with 61% of adults who reported medium police visibility (seeing officers/PCSOs on foot patrol in their local area about/less than once a month) and 53% of adults who reported low police visibility (never seeing officers/PCSOs on foot patrol in their local area)
- In 2013/14, victims in 74% of incidents were (very or fairly) satisfied with how the police handled the matter, representing no change from the previous year. Before this, the proportion increased from a low of 58% in 2005/06

## 2 . Introduction

Research suggests that positive perceptions of police trust and fairness promote engagement and compliance with the police ([Myhill and Bradford, 2012](#)). Also, if people do not believe that the local police are fair, the police may lose legitimacy and people's connections with the police can be eroded (Jackson et al., 2013). The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) asks several questions which measure confidence and trust in the police.

Research has also shown that police visibility may impact on people's confidence in the police and their concerns about crime ([Skogan, 2009](#)). The CSEW asks adults how often they see police officers or Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) on foot patrol in their local area.

Victim satisfaction with the police is another measure of service delivery. [Myhill and Bradford, 2012](#) found that personal treatment by the police seems to be more important in driving satisfaction than criminal justice outcomes. They suggest that how officers interact with victims, for example in demonstrating interest in what they say, can positively impact on victim satisfaction. The CSEW asks victims if they were satisfied with how the police and other agencies (for example Victim Support) handled their case.

Changes in police numbers may affect perceptions of the police, police visibility and victim satisfaction with the police. Home Office figures<sup>1</sup> showed that at 31 March 2014, there were 127,909 (full-time equivalent) police officers across the 43 police forces in England and Wales (excludes the British Transport Police). This represents a decrease of 1.3% or 1,674 officers, the fifth consecutive annual fall, and the lowest number since March 2002.

The number of operational front-line police officers, may particularly impact on police visibility. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) figures<sup>2</sup> showed that at 31 March 2014 (latest actual figures), there were 113,601 officers, representing 91% of the total number of officers. Examining a 5-year trend shows that whilst the number of front-line officers decreased from 125,756 in 31 March 2010, the proportion increased slightly from 89%.

Over the last 3 years, headline police perceptions' measures on the CSEW have remained fairly stable. These are the proportion of adults who said the local police did a good or excellent job and the proportion who tended or strongly agreed with, overall, having confidence in the local police. The proportion of adults who reported seeing officers/PCSOs on foot patrol in their local area about once a week or more (high police visibility) fell slightly over the same period. The proportion of victims who were satisfied with how the police handled their matter has remained stable in the last 2 years.

Unless otherwise stated, all changes over time and differences in measures described in this chapter are statistically significant at the 5% level. Please see Chapter 8 of the [user guide](#) for a more detailed explanation.

## Notes

1. See [Police workforce, England and Wales, 31 March 2014](#). In January 2015, figures at 30 September 2014 were published. However, to be consistent with the 2013/14 period this publication relates to, figures at 31 March 2014 have been used.
2. See [Policing in Austerity: Meeting the Challenge](#). Figures as at March 2015 are provided in the report. However, these have not been reported on as they are projections and are not precisely comparable with the 2010 to 2014 figures cited.

## 3 . Section 1 - Ratings and perceptions of the local police

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) asks adults a number of questions on how satisfied they are with the police and the services they deliver. These range from asking for general views on how good a job the police are doing to more specific questions on, for example, how well the police understand local concerns and how effective the police are at catching criminals.

Changes to the order of the questions in the Performance of the Criminal Justice System module in the 2011/12 CSEW had the unforeseen effect of changing the way in which people perceived and responded to some questions. Essentially, because of the changes, it is likely that some questions were answered more positively. This resulted in direct comparability with previous years' data being lost. Question areas that are affected and covered in this section are "overall ratings of the local police" and "perceptions of the local police".

The [methodological note \(167 Kb Pdf\)](#) provides a more detailed account of the changes.

## 4 . Overall ratings of the local police

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) has asked adults since 2003/04: "Taking everything into account, how good a job do you think the police in this area are doing?"

Figure 1.1 shows that the proportion of adults who gave the local police a positive rating (said they did a good or excellent job) in 2013/14 was 63%. This represents a small increase from the 2012/13 figure (61% <sup>1</sup>) and is similar to the 2011/12 figure (62%). While not directly comparable (see above), before this the proportion of adults who gave a positive rating increased from 47% in 2003/04 to 59% in 2010/11.

**Figure 1.1: Positive ratings of the local police, 2003/04 to 2013/14 CSEW**



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. The figures for 2011/12 onwards are not directly comparable with previous years' figures. See the methodological note published alongside Focus On: Public Perceptions of Policing 2011/12 for more information

**Notes for overall ratings of the local police**

1. Whilst figure 1.1 appears to show a total value of 62% for 2012/13, the 61% percent quoted here is actually correct as the calculation for this is based on unrounded data whilst the tables are presented to the nearest whole number

## 5 . Overall ratings of the local police by background characteristics

The 2013/14 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed that 63% of adults gave the local police a positive rating (said they did a good or excellent job), with no difference between adults of white and non-white ethnic backgrounds (63% and 62% respectively). In line with previous years' results, there was variation according to certain characteristics. Some of the findings included:

- Women were more likely than men to give the local police a positive rating (64% and 61% respectively)
- Those aged 75 and above were the most likely to give the local police a positive rating (69%)
- Those who were employed were more likely to give the local police a positive rating than those who were unemployed (63% compared with 52%)
- Adults who had the highest level of educational qualifications (degree or diploma) were more likely to give the local police a positive rating than those who had no qualifications (66% and 62% respectively)
- Adults who perceived local crime to be lower than average were more likely to give the local police a positive rating than those who perceived it to be higher than average (70% and 44% respectively)
- Similarly, those who perceived anti-social behaviour (ASB) in their area to be low were more likely to give the local police a positive rating than those who perceived it to be high (65% compared with 42%)
- Adults who were not victims of crime in the past 12 months were more likely to give a positive rating than those who were (64% compared with 55%)
- Adults who were living in the 20% least deprived areas<sup>1</sup> were more likely to give the local police a positive rating than adults living in the 20% most deprived areas (69% compared with 56%)

[Appendix tables 1.02 and 1.03 \(733.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) contain further breakdowns on ratings of the local police by both personal and household/area characteristics.

## Notes for overall ratings of the local police by background characteristics

1. Deprivation is measured using an employment deprivation indicator. See section 7.1 of the [User Guide \(1.59 Mb Pdf\)](#) for more information on how this is calculated.

## 6 . Perceptions of the local police

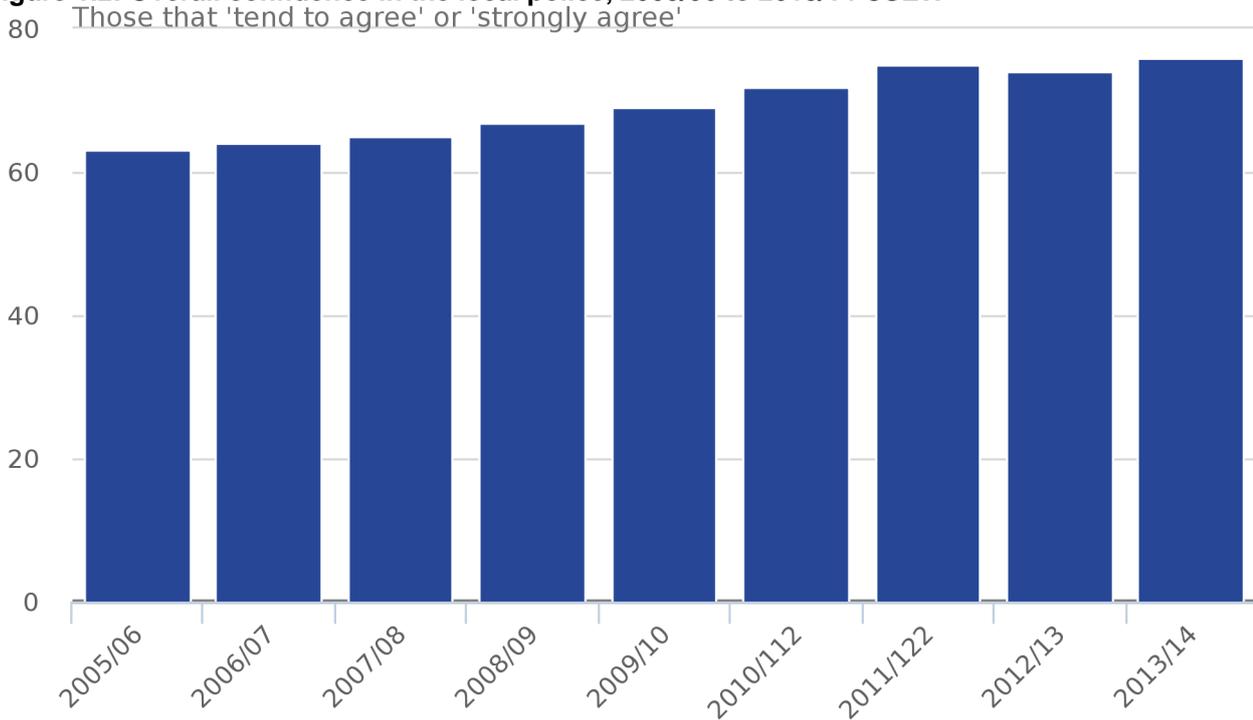
As well as the general rating's question, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) also asks adults whether they agree or disagree with 6 specific statements relating to their perceptions of the local police:

- Police can be relied upon when needed
- Police would treat you with respect
- Police would treat you fairly
- Police understand local concerns
- Police deal with local concerns
- Taking everything into account I have confidence in the police

All 6 statements have been included in the survey since 2004, but the first full year of data was not available until the 2005/06 survey. These questions were designed to explore specific areas of police legitimacy.

Figure 1.2 shows that the proportion of adults who (tended to or strongly) agreed with, overall, having confidence in the local police, was 76% in 2013/14. This represents a small increase from the 2012/13 and the 2011/12 figures (74% and 75%). While not directly comparable (see above), prior to this, the proportion rose from 63% in 2005/06 to 72% in 2010/11.

**Figure 1.2: Overall confidence in the local police, 2005/06 to 2013/14 CSEW**



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

**Notes:**

1. The figures for 2011/12 onwards are not directly comparable with previous years' figures. See the methodological note published alongside Focus On: Public Perceptions of Policing 2011/12 for more information

Table 1.1 shows that there were statistically significant increases in the proportion of adults agreeing with 4 of the 6 rating statements between 2012/13 and 2013/14. These were: "police can be relied upon when needed (2 percentage point increase)", "police understand local concerns" (1 percentage point increase), "police deal with local concerns" (2 percentage point increase) and "taking everything into account I have confidence in the police" (1 percentage point increase<sup>1</sup>).

**Table 1.1: Perceptions of the local police, 2005/06 to 2013/14 CSEW**

England and Wales

Adults aged 16 and over

Perception measure	Percentage agreeing					Statistically significant change, 2012/13 - 2013/14
	2005 /06	2010 /11	2011 /12 <sup>1</sup>	2012 /13 <sup>1</sup>	2013 /14 <sup>1</sup>	
Police can be relied upon when needed	47	54	59	59	61	*
Police would treat you with respect	82	85	86	86	86	
Police would treat you fairly	63	67	67	65	65	
Police understand local concerns	60	67	72	71	72	*
Police deal with local concerns	49	58	62	60	62	*
Overall confidence in local police	63	72	75	74	76	*
Unweighted base - number of adults <sup>2</sup>	47,431	46,467	45,736	34,628	35,075	

Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Numbers from the 2011/12 CSEW onwards are not directly comparable with those previous. See the methodological note published alongside Focus On: Public Perceptions of Policing 2011/12 for more information.
2. Unweighted base refers to overall confidence in the local police. Other bases will be similar.

**Notes for perceptions of the local police**

1. Whilst table 1.1 appears to show a 2 percentage point increase between 2012/13 and 2013/14, the 1 percentage point rise is actually correct as the calculation for this is based on unrounded data whilst the tables are presented to the nearest whole number.

**7 . Overall confidence in the local police by background characteristics**

The 2013/14 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) asked adults whether “Taking everything into account I have confidence in the police in this area”. 76% of people responded tending to or strongly agreeing with the statement. Men and women reported similar levels of confidence (75% compared with 76%) but there was some variation according to other characteristics. Some of the findings included:

- Adults in the oldest age group (75 and over) were the most likely to have confidence in the local police (84% did) whilst adults in the youngest age group (16 to 24) were the least likely (72% did)
- Asian or Asian British adults were the most likely to report confidence in the local police whilst Black or Black British adults were the least likely (79% and 70% respectively)
- Adults who perceived local crime to be lower than average were more likely to have confidence in the local police than those who perceived it to be higher than average (82% compared with 57%)
- Adults who perceived their area to have a low level of anti-social behaviour (ASB) reported more confidence in the local police than those who perceived their area to have a high level (79% and 56% respectively).

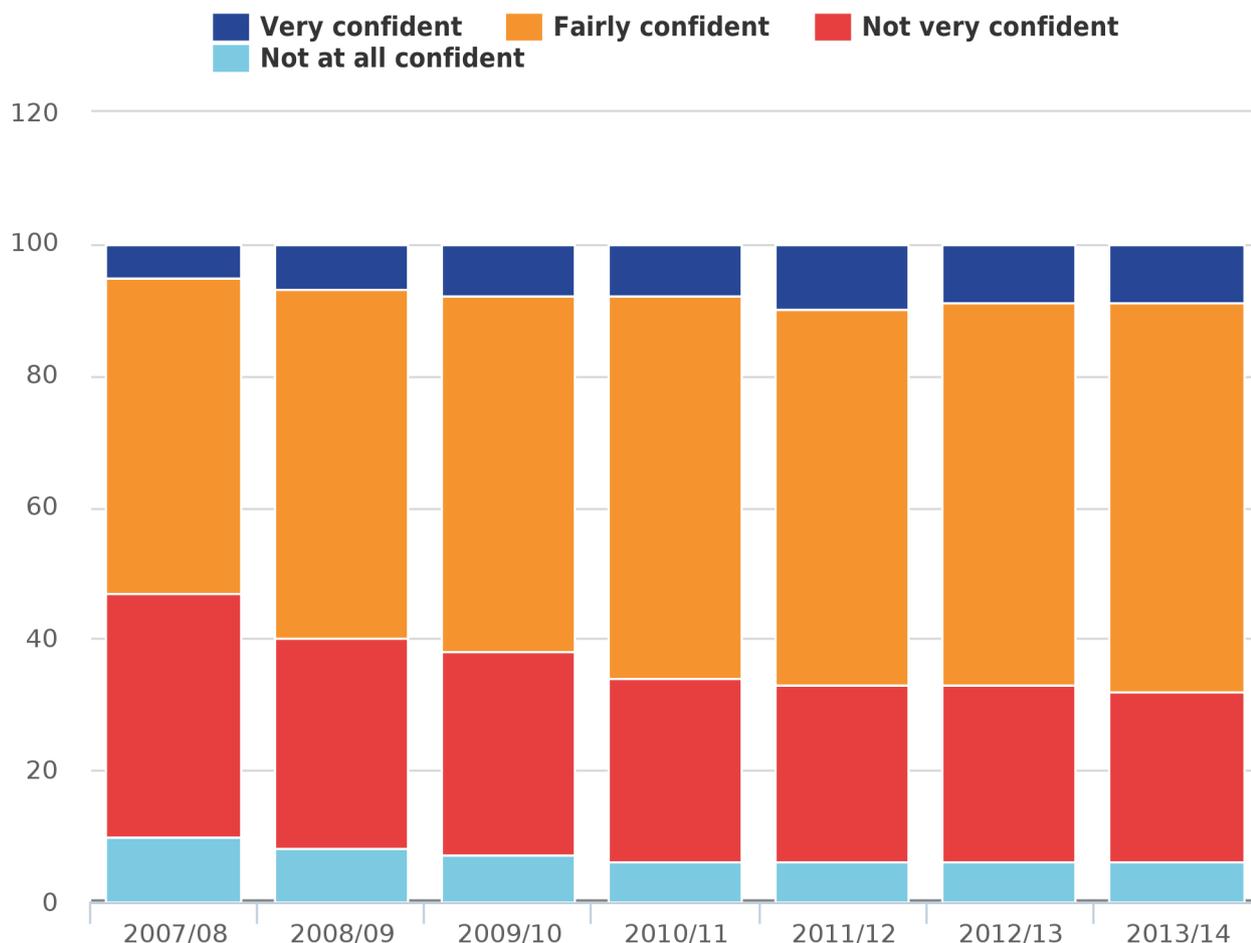
[Appendix tables 1.05 and 1.06 \(733.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) contain further breakdowns on the overall confidence statement by both personal and household/area characteristics.

## **8 . Confidence in the police at catching criminals**

Since 2007/08, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) has asked adults “How confident are you that the police are effective at catching criminals?”. Figure 1.3 shows that the proportion of adults who were (fairly or very) confident that the police were effective at catching criminals increased from 53% in 2007/08 to 69% in 2013 /14.

[Appendix table 1.07 \(733.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) shows trend data for this question.

**Figure 1.3: Confidence in the police at catching criminals, 2007/08 to 2013/14 CSEW**



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

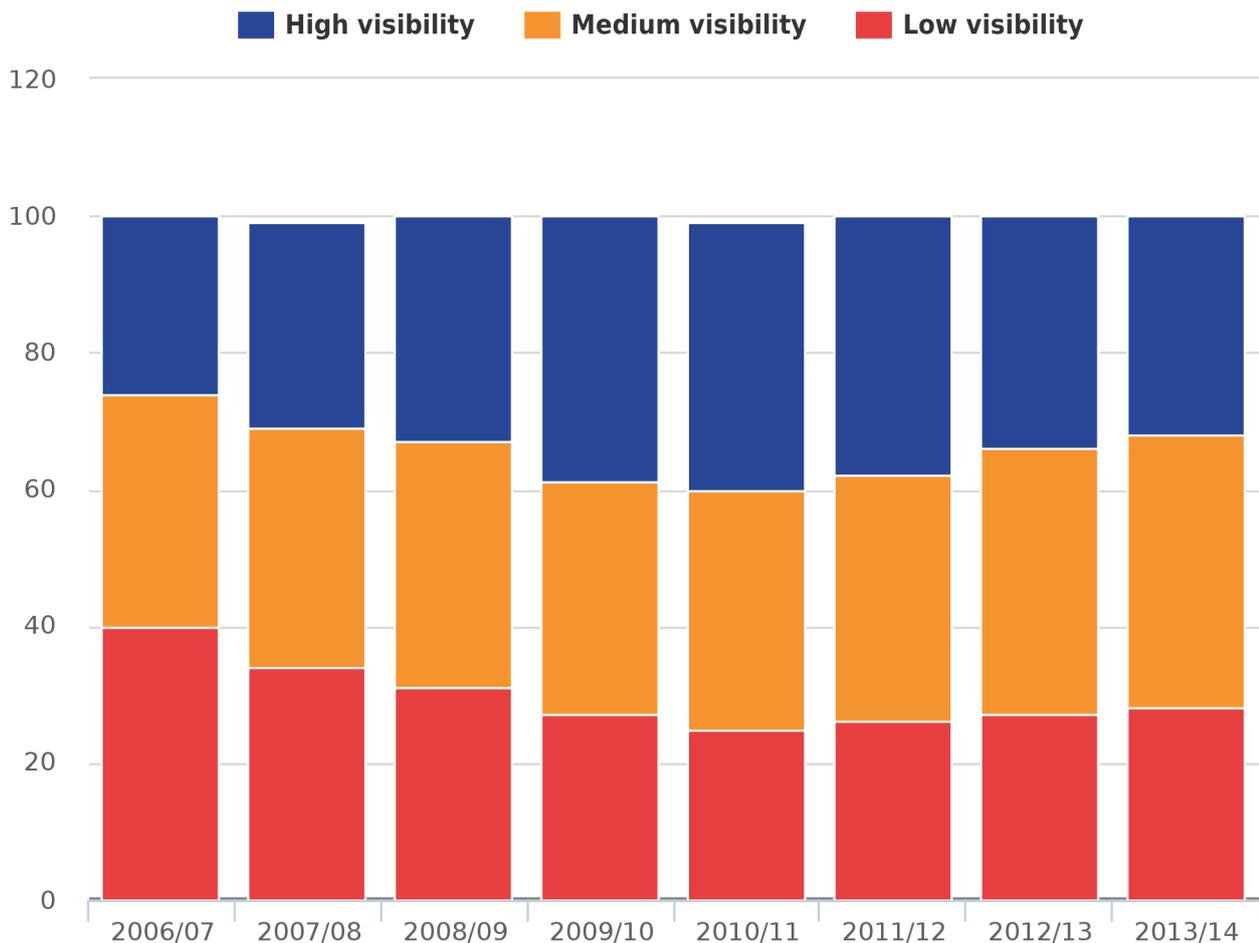
## 9 . Section 2 - Visibility of the police

Since 2006/07 the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) has asked adults how often they see police officers or Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) on foot patrol in their local area.

Figure 1.4 shows police/PCSO visibility trends. The proportion of adults who reported seeing officers/PCSOs on foot patrol in their local area about once a week or more (high visibility) was 32% in 2013/14. This continued the downward trend seen since 2010/11, when the reported level of high police visibility was at its peak (39%). Prior to then, the proportion of adults reporting high visibility rose from 26% in 2006/07.

The proportion of adults who reported seeing officers/PCSOs on foot patrol in their local area about/less than once a month (medium visibility) rose from 34% in 2006/07 to 40% in 2013/14. Finally, the proportion of adults who reported never seeing officers/PCSOs on foot patrol in their local area (low visibility) decreased from 40% in 2006/07 to 25% in 2010/11, the series low. Since then, the figure has increased to 28% in 2013/14.

Figure 1.4: Visibility of police officer/PCSO foot patrols, 2006/07 to 2013/14 CSEW



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. Those that responded "Don't know" have been excluded from this chart

## 10 . Visibility of the police by background characteristics

Certain characteristics were associated with reporting high visibility of the police (seeing officers/Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) on foot patrol in their local area about once a week or more). Findings for the 2013/14 CSEW included:

- Men were more likely to report high visibility of the police than women (34% compared with 31%)
- Adults in the youngest grouping (those aged 16 to 24) were the most likely to report high visibility of the police (41%) whilst adults in the oldest grouping (those aged 75 and over) were the least likely (17%)
- Adults of a non-white ethnic background were more likely to report high visibility of the police (44%) than adults of a white ethnic background (31%)
- Of adults who were unemployed, 52% reported high visibility of the police compared with 33% of adults in employment
- Of adults who perceived crime to be higher than average in their local area, 38% reported high visibility of the police compared with 29% of adults who perceived crime to be lower than average
- Similarly, adults who perceived their area to have a high level of anti-social behaviour (ASB) were more likely to report high visibility of the police (45%) than adults who perceived their area to have a low level (31%)
- For adults living in urban areas, 37% reported high visibility of the police compared with 12% in rural areas
- Adults living in the 20% most deprived areas were more likely to report high visibility of the police than adults living in the 20% least deprived areas (43% compared with 24%)

[Appendix tables 1.12 and 1.13 \(733.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) contain further breakdowns on police visibility by both personal and household/area charact

## 11 . Section 3 - Relationship between ratings and visibility of the police

Visibility provides what [Povey \(2001\)](#) refers to as “comfort factors”; these are approaches that provide reassurance to the public about police presence, such as Neighbourhood Watch schemes, patrolling police, and obvious presence of CCTV. As detailed in figure 1.5, the 2013/14 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) shows that adults who reported high visibility of the police gave the local police a positive rating 71% of the time. This compares with 61% of adults who reported medium visibility of the police and 53% of adults who reported low visibility of the police.

**Figure 1.5: Ratings of the local police by the visibility of police officer/PCSO foot patrols, 2013/14 CSEW**



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales - Office for National Statistics

## 12 . Section 4 - Victim satisfaction

Victim satisfaction continues to be an important focus of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and police forces have a mandatory responsibility to run their own surveys of victim satisfaction. These are known as “User Satisfaction Surveys”, which include victims of burglary, violent crime (excluding domestic violence) and vehicle crime<sup>1</sup>. Further to this, the Ministry of Justice<sup>2</sup> has recently committed to “increase transparency and accountability to ensure criminal justice agencies are held to account for the service they provide to victims”.

Since 1992, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) has asked victims of crime “Overall, were you (the victim) satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the police handled the matter?” Responses to this question can vary according to the crime type, the victim’s background characteristics and the victim’s experiences of the criminal justice system. As the victim satisfaction question in the CSEW asks about each individual incident, victims of multiple incidents will be counted more than once. Therefore, analysis is based on the numbers of incidents, rather than on individuals.

The 2013/14 CSEW showed that victims in 74% of incidents were (“very” or “fairly”) satisfied with how the police handled the matter, representing no change from the previous year. Before this, the proportion increased from a low of 58% in 2005/06.

[Appendix table 1.14 \(733.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) contains trend data on victim satisfaction.

### Notes for section 4 - Victim satisfaction

1. Results from these surveys are published quarterly in [HMIC's Crime and Policing Comparator](#).
2. See Section 3 of '[Our commitment to victims](#)' for more information.

# 13 . Victim satisfaction by background characteristics, crime type and experiences of the CJS

Key variations in victim satisfaction with the police by certain characteristics included:

- Victim satisfaction with the police in incidents experienced by young adults aged 16 to 24 was lower (68%) than in incidents experienced by those in the 25 to 34 (78%), 65 to 74 (80%) and the 75 and over (84%) age groups
- The apparent differences in satisfaction between incidents experienced by males and females and between incidents experienced by adults of white and non-white ethnic backgrounds were not statistically significant
- Victim satisfaction with the police in incidents experienced by people living in the 20% most deprived areas was lower (68%) than those living in the 20% least deprived areas (79%)

There were some differences in satisfaction with the police dependent on the type of offence the incident related to. Victim satisfaction with the police in incidents of violence or criminal damage was lower (70% and 67% respectively) than in incidents of theft (77%).

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) also asks adults about their wider experiences of the Criminal Justice System, such as whether the police treated them fairly, whether anyone was caught and whether the offender went to court. For some of these issues there are differences in reported levels of victim satisfaction.

Previous analysis of the CSEW has suggested that, in keeping with the theory of “procedural justice” (which emphasises fairness and transparency in the criminal justice process), the way victims are treated by police has a greater impact on satisfaction than criminal justice outcomes ([Myhill and Bradford, 2012](#)). The 2013/14 CSEW provides some evidence to support this:

- There were far higher levels of victim satisfaction in incidents where the victim felt the police had treated them fairly (87%) compared to those where the victim felt they had not (12%)
- There was, however, no difference in satisfaction levels between those incidents in which the police found out, or knew, who committed the offence and those where they did not (both 74%)
- Satisfaction levels for incidents where the victim felt they were kept well informed by the police (89%) were higher than for when the victim felt they were not kept well informed (38%)

However, there is also some evidence to suggest that outcomes can impact upon victim satisfaction. For example, in incidents where an offender was charged there was a higher level of satisfaction (94%) than when no action was taken (50%).

[Appendix tables 1.15-1.18 \(733.5 Kb Excel sheet\)](#) contain breakdowns of victim satisfaction by crime type, household and personal/area characteristics and CJS factors.

## 14. References

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (2014) "[Policing in Austerity: Meeting the Challenge](#)", HMIC: London

Home Office (2014) "[Police workforce, England and Wales](#)", HO: London

Jackson J, Bradford B, Stanko E and Hohl K (2013) Just Authority? Trust in the Police in England and Wales, Routledge: Abingdon

Ministry of Justice (2014) "[Our commitment to victims](#)", MOJ: London

Myhill A and Bradford B (2012) "[Can police enhance public confidence by improving quality of service? Results from two surveys in England and Wales](#)", Policing and Society 22, pp 397 to 425

Povey, K (2001) "[Open all hours: A thematic inspection report on the role of police visibility and accessibility in public reassurance](#)", HMIC: London

Skogan W, (2009) "[Concern about Crime and Confidence in the Police: Reassurance or Accountability](#)", Police Quarterly 12, pp 301 to 318

## 15. Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting [www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html) or from the Media Relations Office email: [media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk)

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.