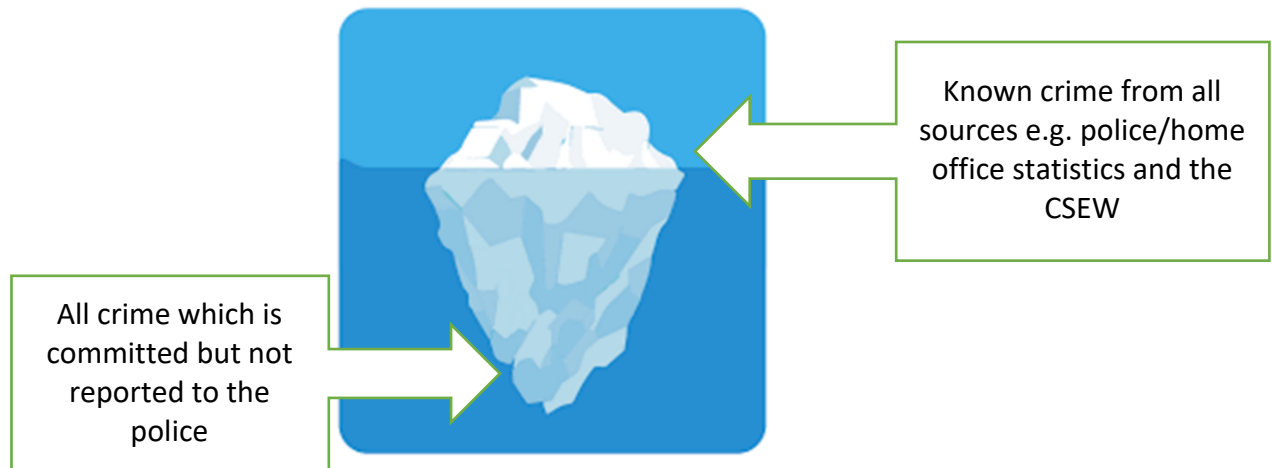


EVALUATE METHODS OF COLLECTING STATISTICS

The Dark Figure of Crime



RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability

Reliability is the consistency of statistics that we collect. If they vary a great deal from year to year or when different people collect them, we may conclude that we cannot rely on them – they are unreliable statistics. The **Home office** and **CSEW** are thought to be reliable, that is the methods used do not produce massive variations in the results from year to year.

Validity

Validity refers whether statistics are giving us a true picture of crime. For example, the **CSEW** will ask the population if they have been a victim of crime. Statistics from the police may be very **reliable** but most criminologists agree that they rarely give a true picture of crime as it is committed.

Two Main Ways of Measuring Crime

1) Police Statistics (AKA – Home Office or Official Statistics)

Police Recorded Crime (PRC) are gathered by the Home Office to show Police activity every year. They are categorised by location, offence type and time, and are always publicly accessible. These are likely to change every year and are affected by policy (meaning that some may not be recorded) and to a much lesser extent crime that is being committed. While it is a **reliable** measure of crime it is not thought to be a particularly valid measure because it is only made up of crimes which have been reported to the police. It has low **validity**.

2) Victim Surveys (Crime Survey of England and Wales/British Crime Survey)

CSEW is a large survey of crime in England and Wales. It takes a representative sample of 51,000 people over the age of 16 living in England or Wales and asks about their experiences of crime. It is regarded as a much more **valid** measure of crime than the official statistics as it taps into unrecorded or unreported crime. Because it has good validity it also has good reliability.

OFFICIAL STATISTICS AND VICTIM SURVEYS

POLICE STATISTICS

(AKA – Home Office or Official Statistics)

Advantages

- **Police will record information before it is forgotten.** This is a major strength compared to victim survey which rely on the accurate recall by victims of events that may have happened some time ago (up to a year).
- **Police will record even insignificant details** - others may not consider these important.
- **A practical advantage** is that the police can immediately respond with victim support if needed.

Disadvantages

- **Police may choose not to record crime.** This is particularly true of when the value of items stolen is small or when the police consider the act a private matter, a 'domestic' incident.
- **Unreported crimes are not recorded, this is probably the majority of crimes.** We are only ever seeing the 'tip of the iceberg' with police statistics.
- For these two reasons police statistics are not very good at revealing the **dark figure of crime**

VICTIM SURVEYS

(Crime Survey of England and Wales/British Crime Survey)

Advantages

- **Records otherwise unreported crime**, for example we know that the rate of sexual offences in the population is much higher than the official statistics would suggest.
- **Records peoples personal experiences of crime and how this actually affects them;** this is something that official statistics doesn't even attempt to capture
- **Has a very large (and representative) sample.** 51,000 people is a very large sample and is likely to capture nearly every type of crime committed in the UK, this means that the CSEW is generally regarded as a **valid** measure of crime.

Disadvantages

- **Fails to capture "victimless" crimes;** for example, White-Collar Crime and Moral Crime. We can report crime that we are unaware of.
- **Relies on the accuracy of the victim's memory** – studies of episodic memory reveal that this is surprisingly fragile, we forget very quickly, a year is a long time.
- **Victim surveys such as the CSEW don't capture everything.** Although generally regarded as more valid than the official statistics, because it reports recorded and unrecorded/unreported crime, we should be aware that people may be still afraid to report, even anonymously.