

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PARTNERSHIP

“Creating a knowledge-base of public confidence in the criminal justice system”

<http://criminaljusticeresearch.ncl.ac.uk/>



RESEARCH BRIEFING

Project Output 4A
May 2008

Survey Data Collection

PURPOSE OF BRIEFING

This briefing paper gives an overview of the survey design and data collection period. A more detailed report on this phase of the project, including references, will be included in the final report on the empirical research which will be available after all phases of the data collection and analysis have been completed. This report will be available at the end of February 2009.

SURVEY AIM

The aim of the survey was to collect data which would enable us to increase our understanding of how adults (over the age of 18) living in the Northumbria area think about the criminal justice system, including the issues which they think are important, their expectations of the service it provides and what they see as their responsibilities in relation to reporting crime and engaging with the system. Because considerations of cost prevented us from sending a questionnaire to *all* adults living in this area, our survey was designed to enable us to make confident inferences about the views of the whole population based on data collected from a small sample of individuals.

DATA COLLECTION MODE

A postal survey was selected as the most cost-effective way to achieve the survey aims.

SAMPLING

POPULATION

The population to be sampled was adults over the age of 18 living in the Northumbria Area.

SAMPLING METHOD

A stratified random sample of named individuals was selected. Random sampling allows the use of inference from the sample to the population as a whole and is generally recognised as the ideal sampling technique in the social sciences. Distributing questionnaires to named individuals (as opposed to ‘the occupier’) is also known to boost the response rate in postal questionnaires. The sample was stratified according to local authority area to ensure even

coverage of each of the sub-regions within the whole area, thus reducing the risk of an atypical sample being selected. Each individual sampled was given a Unique Reference Number (URN), corresponding to the local authority area in which they lived, this was printed on the corner of the front page of the questionnaire. This ensured that responses could be monitored to avoid sending reminder mailings to those who had already replied. It also meant that the questionnaires could be analysed according to the local authority area in which respondents lived.

SAMPLE SIZE

It was estimated that in order to ensure that meaningful analysis could be carried out, at least 1000 responses would be required. If we were able to obtain a good response rate of 20% this would mean that questionnaires would need to be sent to 5000 individuals.

SAMPLING FRAME

The company Experian was used to obtain a sample of 5001 adults (over 18) living in the Northumbria area, stratified according to the local authority they lived in (based on a list of postcodes obtained via the Office for National Statistics). This sample was drawn from Experian's database 'National Canvase' which is compiled using the edited¹ electoral list and consumer data.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

DESIGN

The questionnaire was designed in light of the ideas and insights generated by the literature review and with reference to the findings of the initial stage of exploratory qualitative research.

PILOTING

There were three stages of piloting. In the first pilot the questionnaire was subject to an 'expert review' by the project team and subsequently refined. In the second pilot four postgraduate students filled in the questionnaire and took part in a detailed debrief to identify areas of difficulty and ambiguity. The questionnaire was subsequently revised. In the third pilot the questionnaire was delivered in person to ten members of the public, who were given a brief explanation of the research and agreed to fill in the questionnaire and to note down any difficulties they encountered. The completed questionnaires were then collected and analysed to identify any problems with the question format. The questionnaire was subsequently revised.

PRESENTATION

To ensure that people were motivated to complete the questionnaire it was decided that it should be no more than 8 sides of A4 in length, including any explanations. This would also ensure that material and printing costs were kept to an acceptable level within the budget. The final stage of design therefore involved formatting the question layout to ensure that it would fit onto 8 pages. It was also necessary to make the questionnaire as attractive as possible to maximise response rates. A covering letter and fact sheet about the research were also designed, again with a view to maximising response rate and reassuring respondents about confidentiality.

¹ The edited electoral list comprises all individuals who are registered to vote and have *not* opted to have their details withheld from the edited electoral list. This is the only list of voters available for purchase by external organisations, including social researchers.

DATA COLLECTION

TIMING

Survey data collection took place during April and May 2008. The first mailing was sent on 4th April and the second mailing, to those who had not yet responded, on 28th April. The cut-off date was 23rd May. However 19 responses were received after this time and were manually added to the database so that they were not excluded from the final analysis.

MAILING FORMAT

Questionnaires were sent second class in C5 Envelopes.

RESPONSE

Respondents were provided with FREEPOST envelopes to return their questionnaires. In total 1300 questionnaires were received back. A further 114 letters were returned as undeliverable. This gives a response rate (based on questionnaires successfully delivered) of 27%.

DATA CAPTURE

Data was captured by the company NData. Questionnaires were electronically scanned and responses captured to an SPSS file. Free text responses were manually entered twice to check for accuracy.

EVALUATION

SURVEY POWER

The larger the sample obtained the more powerful the analysis which can be carried out on the data. The sample obtained consisted of 1300 individuals. This is a large enough sample to enable descriptive and inferential analysis to be carried out.

SAMPLING BIAS

The population to be sampled was adults (over the age of 18) living in the Northumbria Police Force Area. It is not possible to obtain a complete list of these individuals and therefore a sampling frame had to be selected. Because no sampling frame for this population will provide complete coverage, bias can be introduced through the choice of sampling frame. The sampling frame chosen for this survey is however, considering the size of the budget, the best available option and in line with established precedents for surveys of this type.

NON-RESPONSE BIAS

The more people who receive the questionnaire but choose not to return it the more non-response bias is introduced to a survey. We do not know what the individuals who did not return the survey think and therefore our analysis will necessarily be biased towards the views of people who are more likely to return the questionnaire. A response rate of 27% for a mailing survey, based on two mailings, is a reasonable response rate and, whilst we cannot claim that the survey data is completely unbiased, the level of bias introduced can be considered to be within acceptable levels for this kind of research.

CONCLUSION

Overall the survey data collection was a success. The response rate exceeded expectations and enough questionnaires were returned to enable some powerful analysis to be carried out. Bias introduced through the sampling frame and through non-response can be considered to be within normal and acceptable levels for this type of research.