

# Developing new questions on public perceptions of the fairness and effectiveness of the CJS

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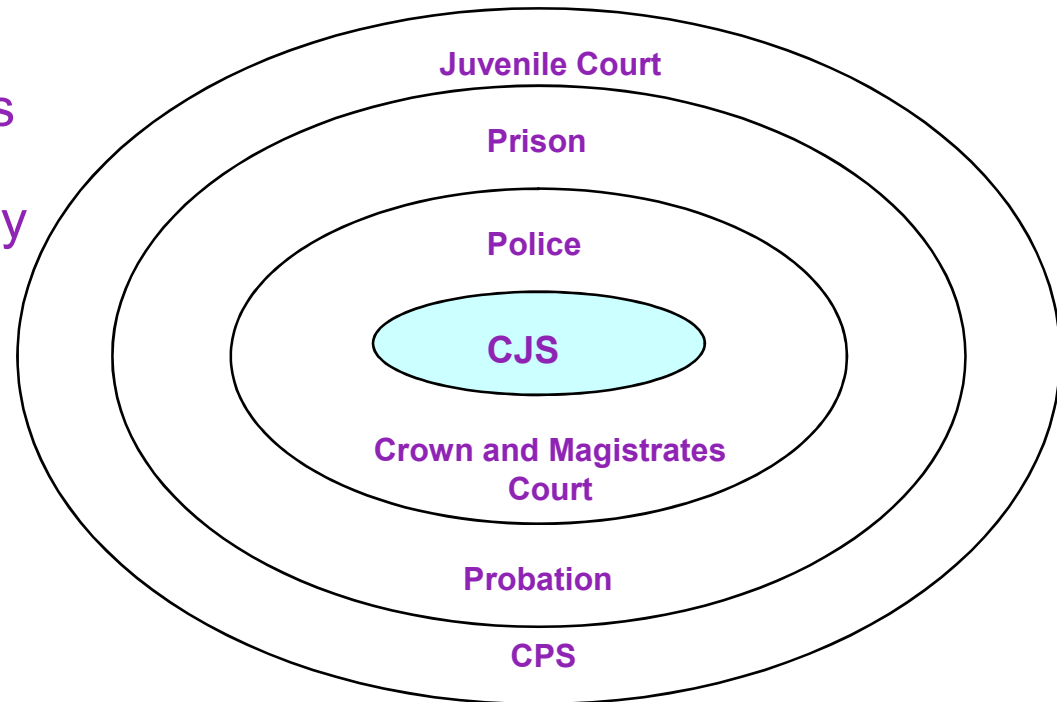
# Background



- New CJS performance targets
- Develop better measures of perceptions of fairness and effectiveness
- A multi-stage approach consisting of five key stages:
  1. Qualitative research involving 12 mini group discussions lasting approximately 90 minutes each
  2. Workshop style presentation to the Home Office
  3. Development and cognitive testing of draft questions
  4. Placement of revised questions on BMRB Omnibus for rapid evaluation
  5. Agreeing final set of questions and introducing them into the BCS in October 2007

# Familiarity and conceptualisation of CJS

- Low familiarity with the term ‘Criminal Justice System’
- General awareness CJS consisted of constituent parts
- Parts associated most closely with the CJS were:
  - the police
  - the courts
  - Prisons
- Others (such as Juvenile Courts and the Crown Prosecution Service) less so.



# Views of the CJS



- Were derived from a number of sources including
  - personal experiences
  - word of mouth
  - local and national media
- Respondents with no personal experience relied heavily upon the media to form their views

# Effectiveness of CJS



- This was understood in terms of
  - “getting things done”
  - Linked with various functions of the agencies such as:
    - Catching offenders
    - Sentencing and punishment
    - Reducing re-offending
  - Harder for people to articulate effectiveness for less well known agencies

# Conceptualising fairness of CJS

- This was understood in terms of
  - “equality” or being “treated well”
- Attitudes did vary for
  - particular groups
  - or individuals involved
  - and as well as the crime type and circumstances

# Conceptualising fairness of CJS



- Further discussions about equality showed people felt
  - CJS should not treat all groups “equally”
  - Preferential treatment should be given to some groups
- Varied for defendants, victims and offenders

# Perceptions of national v local CJS



- Interested in perceptions of the national v local CJS
- Found that these were defined in terms of the ‘type’ of crime
  - ‘Petty’ crimes were more associated with the local area
  - ‘High level’ crimes, such as terrorism and paedophile rings seen as belonging to national CJS
- This varied depending on knowledge and experience of CJS
  - Those who had experienced the CJS in some form, tended to think ‘locally’
  - Those who relied on the media to form their opinion tended to think ‘nationally’
- Asking separately about the ‘local’ CJS problematic
  - significantly higher proportions said ‘don’t know’ when asked about the local CJS

## Research findings: national perceptions



Primarily informed by what was read in newspapers

*“I have gained my experience from national things and from the media because if I see a crime taking place I don’t see the process of what happens after that crime has been committed and in Court, so I’d say my experiences are based solely nationally and from the media. Maybe some like the local press but mainly national. I don’t see this all going on, I just hear about it from the newspapers and the news that I haven’t had any experience of Courts or anything, so I couldn’t take any experience from my own personal life.”*

# Testing questions on CJS effectiveness



- Two question types trialled:
  1. asked directly how 'effective' the CJS or its components was
  2. asked about 'confidence in effectiveness'
- In general it was easier for respondents to answer in terms of their 'confidence in effectiveness'
- Demonstrated by fewer 'don't know' responses

# Asking questions on CJS effectiveness



- Concluded that best approach was to:
  - ask a set of individual questions about the CJS agencies first
  - followed by a question about ‘confidence in the effectiveness of the CJS overall’
- Alternative of deriving this variable using a combination of the effectiveness ratings for the individual agencies rejected

# Questions on CJS effectiveness



Confident that...

- Police are effective at catching criminals
- CPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime
- Courts are effective at dealing with cases promptly
- Courts are effective at giving punishments which fit the crime
- Prisons are effective at punishing offenders who have been convicted of a crime
- Prisons are effective at rehabilitating offenders who have been convicted of a crime
- Probation service is effective at preventing criminals from re-offending

**Criminal Justice System as a whole is effective**

## Questions on CJS fairness



- Because there were different views of what constituted fairness a question set was devised to make people think of these different aspects
- They were then asked to give an overall opinion
- These questions followed the set on effectiveness so did not need to identify the different components of the CJS

# Questions on CJS fairness



Agree or disagree that:

- CJS gives witnesses and victims the support they need
- CJS treats those who have been accused of a crime as 'innocent until proven guilty'
- CJS takes into account the views of victims and witnesses
- CJS takes into account the circumstances surrounding the crime when sentencing
- CJS is too soft on those accused of committing a crime
- CJS achieves the correct balance between the rights of the offender and rights of the victim
- CJS discriminates against particular groups or individuals

**Criminal Justice System as a whole is fair**

# 'Confidence' in the local police



New question introduced at same time as fairness and effectiveness questions to measure a key government target.

New confidence question:

- How much do you agree or disagree that police and local councils are dealing with the anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in your local area?

Old confidence question:

- How good a job do the local police do?

## How do these findings compare to the old confidence measure?



There are some differences between the old and new measures in terms of which groups were most likely to be confident

	Old measure	New measure
Occupation	Managerial/professional	Routine/manual
Tenure	Private renters	Social renters
Level of education	Degrees/diploma	No educational qualifications
ACORN category	'Urban prosperity'	'Hard Pressed'

- Results for new measure are more consistent with those previously found for the question 'the local police are dealing with the things that matter to people in this community'.

## What about those with lower levels of confidence?



Victim of crime in previous 12 months

Lived in the area for less than one year

Aged younger than 75 years

Males

Living in areas with high levels of physical disorder

White ethnic background

Living in 'Hard Pressed areas'

Or are some groups more likely to have an opinion?



## Categories for answers of the two questions:

- Old confidence question:
  - Excellent, good, fair, poor and very poor
- New confidence question:
  - Agree strongly, tend to agree, neither agree nor disagree, tend to disagree, disagree strongly
- New confidence question has an explicit 'no opinion' category

## How does the 'no opinion' option affect the results?



- Some groups are more likely to have an opinion than other groups
- So can be more likely to agree and more likely to disagree
- e.g those living in 'Hard Pressed' ACORN areas and social renters.

	Agree	No opinion	Disagree
Hard pressed areas	47%	24%	29%
Urban prosperity areas	43%	35%	23%

## How does the 'no opinion' option affect the results?



- Still to see how this changes over time.
- Using this type of question means that to improve overall measures of confidence you have to give people a positive opinion not convert people from a negative one.
- Implications for improving confidence through communications.

## For more information



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A copy of the methodological report '*Fairness and effectiveness in the Criminal Justice System: development of questions for the British Crime Survey*' can be downloaded from:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs08/doqbcs.pdf>