

Victim Personal Statements 2016/17

Analysis of the offer and take-up of Victim Personal Statements using the Crime Survey for England and Wales, April 2013 to March 2017.

Foreword



One of my commitments as Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales is to ensure that all victims of crime have a voice within the criminal justice system. The right to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) is an important entitlement and is included in the Victim's Code. The Statement gives victims the opportunity to share how the crime they have been subjected to has had an impact on their lives.

In this report, I present the findings from a secondary analysis of data on Victim Personal Statements from the Crime Survey for England and Wales. This is for the year ending March 2017, and it is the third report I have published using data from this survey's Victimization module. It also follows the review I conducted in 2015 *'The Silenced Victim: A Review of Victim Personal Statements'*, which found that there was a systematic failure in making sure that victims had the opportunity to make a VPS.

This report examines the provision and take-up of Victim Personal Statements broken down by demographic data. As within previous reports, it also uses a longitudinal approach where possible to establish whether provision has improved or worsened over the past four years.

The results show that it is still only a small proportion of victims who are offered the opportunity to make a VPS. Disappointingly, there has been little change over the last four years. However, for victims who had made a VPS, in the last year there has been a significant increase in the proportion of those who felt that their VPS had been taken into account by the criminal justice system. This shows that most victims who make a VPS feel that their voices are heard, and it shows how important it is to ensure that ALL victims are offered the opportunity to make one.

The report shows that there continues to be certain groups of victims who are less likely to be offered the opportunity to make a VPS than others. I have again found significant variations by age, disability status, marital status, ethnicity, religion, region and offence type. I hope that criminal justice agencies will recognise that this means there is still work to do in ensuring all victims are able to have their voices heard within the system.

Finally, I am pleased that the Office for National Statistics have committed to continuing to ask these questions in further iterations of the survey. These questions are crucial for our understanding of the offer and take-up of this important entitlement, and for holding criminal justice agencies to account.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Baroness Newlove". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Headline findings

- **Few victims are offered the opportunity to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) and there has been little change over the last four years that this topic has been included in the Crime Survey for England and Wales.**
 - In 2016/17 victims were given the opportunity to make a VPS by Police in approximately every 1 in 6 incidents (17% of all incidents).
- **Overall, victims are no more or less likely to make a VPS than in previous years, but they are less likely to want their VPS read aloud in court.**
 - In over half of all incidents (56%), victims made a VPS when they were offered the opportunity to do so by Police.
 - In 1 in 5 (19%) incidents, the victims who made a VPS wanted it read aloud in court.
- **While the proportion of incidents where victims felt that their VPS had been taken into account by the Criminal Justice System was higher in 2016/17 than in the previous two years, it also remained consistent with levels first reported in 2013/14.**
 - For 3 in 4 incidents (76% of all incidents), victims who made a VPS felt that it had been taken into account by the Criminal Justice System.
- **There remains variation in these rates within and across most demographic groups and offence types, suggesting that some victims are more or less likely to be offered their VPS entitlement in contrast to others.**

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Key findings by characteristic (i)

- **Age**
 - In 2016/17, for incidents with victims aged 55 to 64 years and 65 to 74 years, victims were half as likely to be offered the opportunity to make a VPS compared to incidents overall. Incidents with victims aged 16 to 24 years were more likely to involve the victim being offered a VPS.
- **Gender**
 - There was no significant difference between the proportions of men and women who were offered the opportunity to make a VPS in 2016/17. Men were, however, less likely to make a VPS when offered the opportunity to do so.
- **Long-standing illness or disability**
 - In incidents where the victim is without a long-standing illness or disability, victims were less likely to be offered the opportunity to make a VPS in 2016/17 when compared to all incidents. Incidents with victims who have a long-standing illness or disability were more likely to be offered a VPS.
- **Marital status**
 - In incidents where the victim is divorced or widowed, victims were less likely to be given the opportunity to make a VPS than for incidents overall.

Key findings by characteristic (ii)

- **Ethnicity**

- In 2016/17, for incidents in which the victim identifies as White, victims were marginally less likely to be offered a VPS when compared to all incidents.

- **Religion**

- Incidents in which the victim identifies as Christian were less likely to see the victim offered a VPS than all incidents. For incidents with victims identifying as of no religion or Muslim, victims were more likely to be offered the opportunity to make a VPS.

- **Region**

- For incidents that took place in the North West and in Yorkshire and the Humber, victims were less likely to be offered a VPS than incidents overall. Incidents in London and the South East were more likely to involve the victim being offered a VPS.

- **Area Type**

- In 2016/17 there was no significant difference between the proportions of victims being offered a VPS by the area type in which incident took place.

- **Offence**

- Incidents where victims were subject to vehicle-related theft, bicycle theft and criminal damage and arson offences, were less likely to involve the victim being offered a VPS than all other incidents.

Introduction (i)

- A Victim Personal Statement (VPS) is the single key entitlement where victims are able to make a statement to explain **how a crime affected them physically, emotionally, financially or in any other way.**
- The purpose of the VPS is to give victims a **voice** in the criminal justice process. It can be considered as part of the evidence before the court prior to sentencing if the defendant is found guilty.
- The VPS entitlement was first formalised in the 2013 version of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, and was upheld in its [2015 update](#).
- Victims are entitled to say whether they would like to read their VPS aloud, or have it read aloud on their behalf, if a defendant is found guilty. Victims have a similar entitlement at a parole hearing where they have opted into the Victim Contact Scheme.
- Once a statement is completed and signed, a VPS cannot be changed or withdrawn – though a further VPS may be submitted to the police to add or clarify points included in the original.
- The VPS will always be shared with the Crown Prosecution Service. If the case reaches court, then the VPS will be served on the court and the defence if it is included as evidence in the trial, so the suspect in a case will usually be able to see it.
- For a more comprehensive review of the VPS [read the 2015 report](#) published by the Victims' Commissioner.

Introduction (ii)

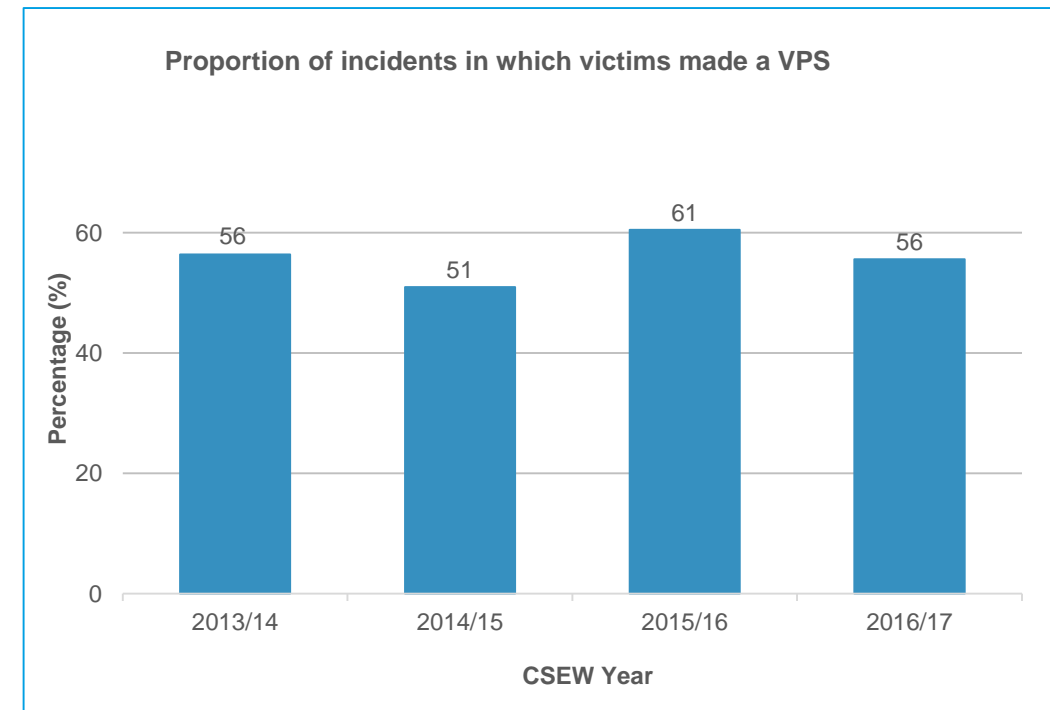
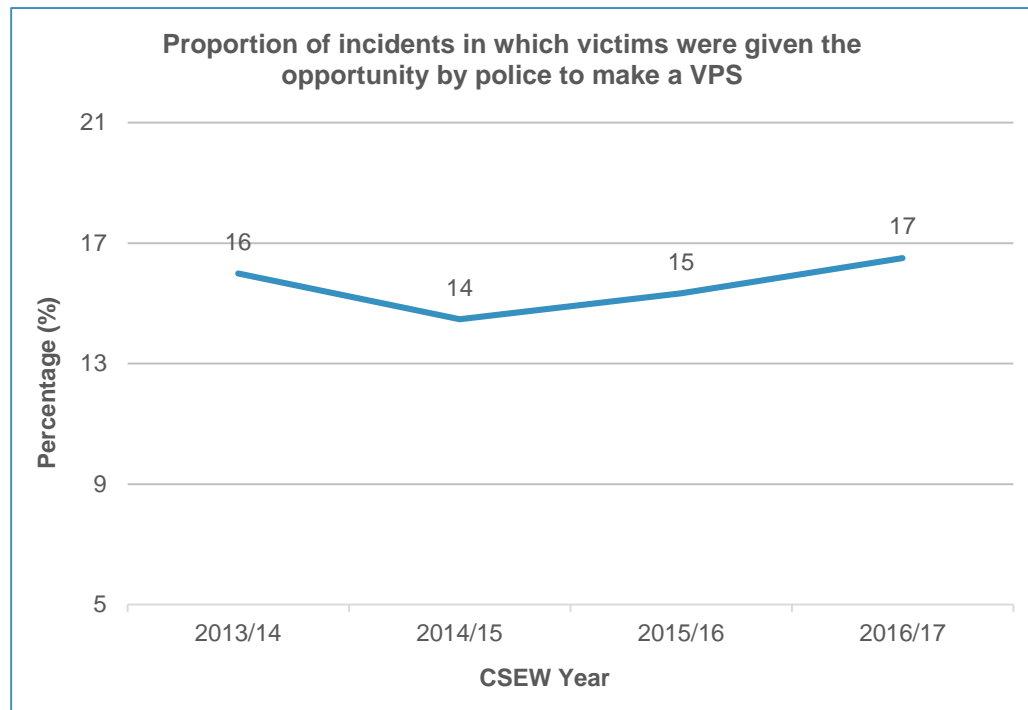
- This review looks at the questions in the Crime Survey for England and Wales outlined in the table below. The table also sets out the number of individuals who were asked this question in the survey (the unweighted survey base). This means the number asked these questions before any weights were applied to the data to ensure it is representative of the wider population.

CSEW Question	2013/14 Unweighted base	2014/15 Unweighted base	2015/16 Unweighted base	2016/17 Unweighted base
Victims of crime have an opportunity to make a formal statement to the police about how the crime affected them financially, physically or emotionally or in any other way. This is called a Victim Personal Statement. Did the police give you this opportunity?	2,778	2,522	2,603	2,398
Did you make a Victim Personal Statement?	402	307	345	335
Did you say you wanted your Victim Personal Statement read aloud in court?	Not asked	137	127	113
Do you feel that what you said in your Victim Personal Statement was taken into account by the Criminal Justice System?	170	123	154	143

All incidents (i)

In 2016/17, in 1 in 6 incidents (17%) victims were offered the opportunity to make a VPS. This is higher than in 2014/15, but there remains no significant change from the previous 12 months ending March 2016.

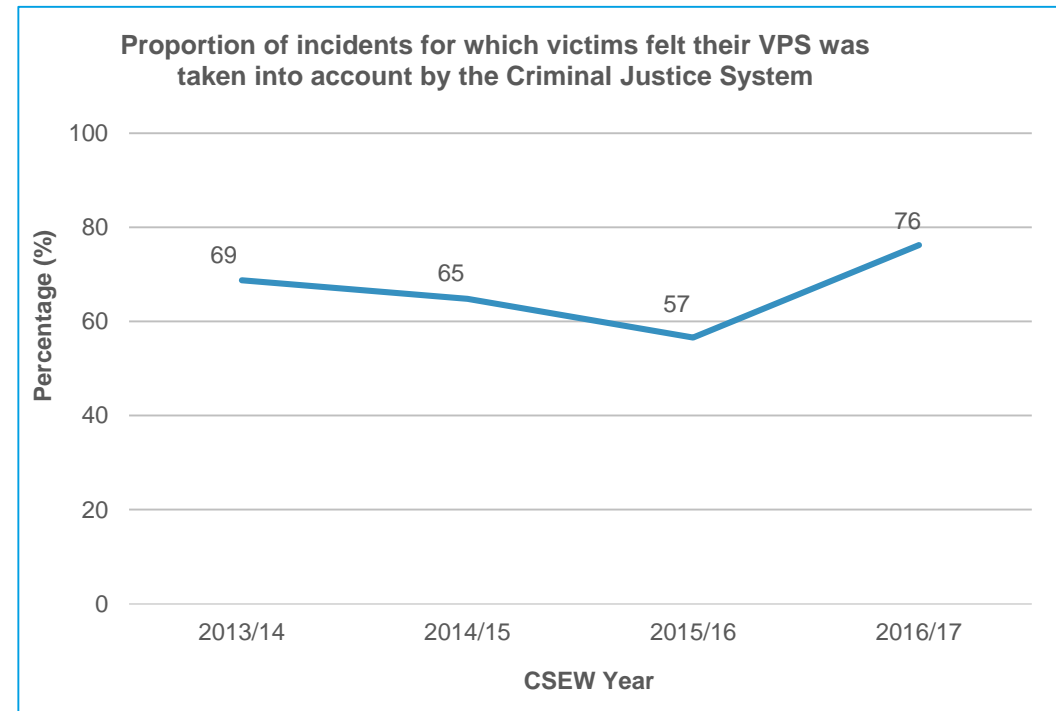
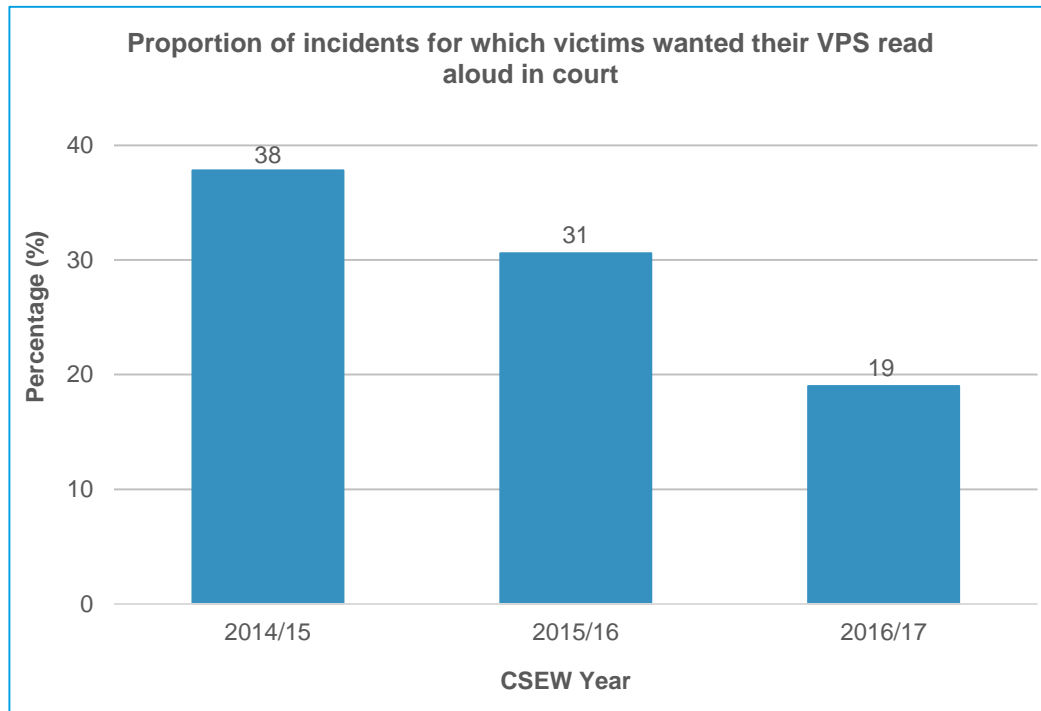
The proportion of incidents in which victims made a VPS in 2016/17 remained consistent with previous years. In over half (56%) of incidents where victims were given the opportunity to make a VPS, the victim did so.



All incidents (ii)

In 2016/17, approximately 1 in 5 (19%) incidents involved victims wanting their VPS read aloud in court, this is lower than in the previous two years in which this question has been asked.

In 2016/17, the proportion of incidents in which victims felt that their VPS had been taken into account is higher than in the previous two years (at 76%), but this remains consistent with levels recorded in 2013/14 when this question was first introduced.

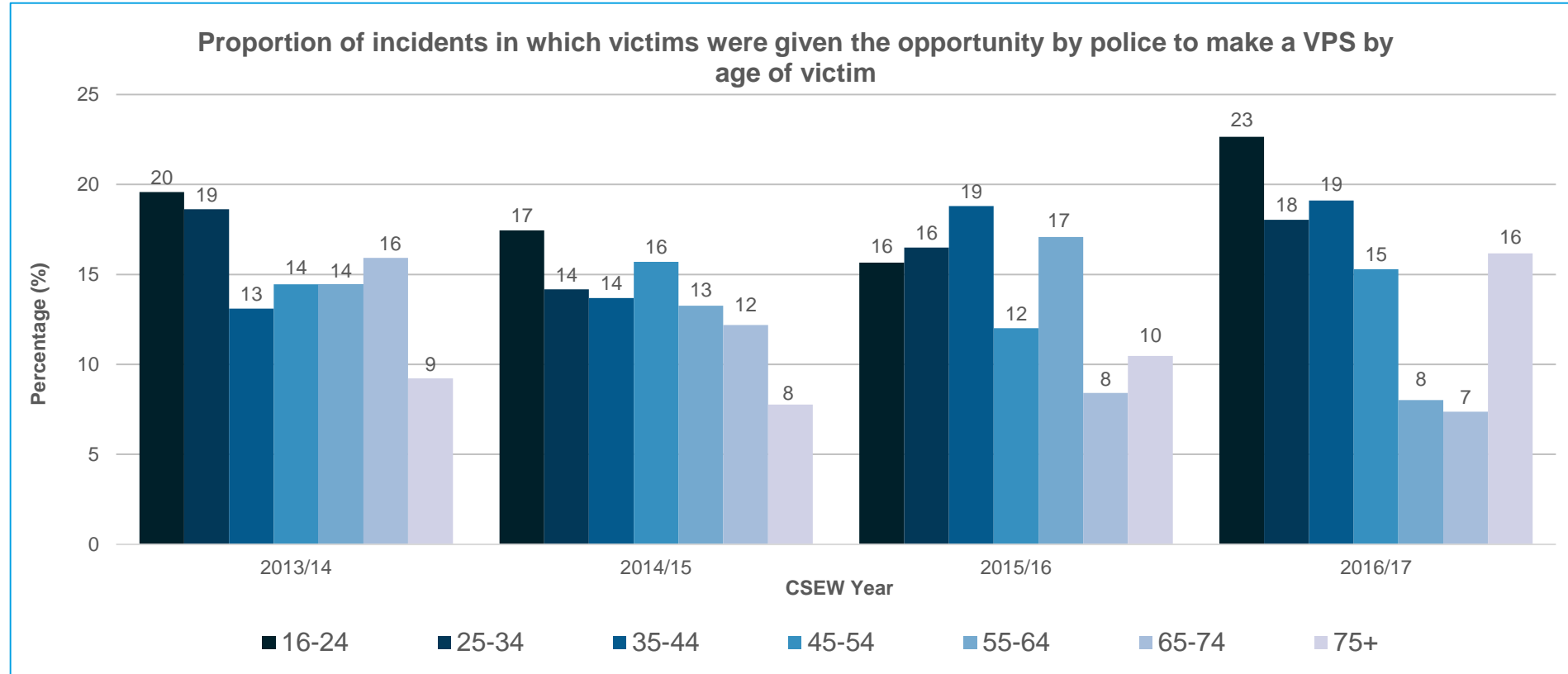


Age

In 2016/17, incidents with victims aged 55 to 64 years and 65 to 74 years were half as likely to involve the victim being offered the opportunity to make a VPS compared with incidents overall (8% and 7% respectively compared to 17% of all incidents).

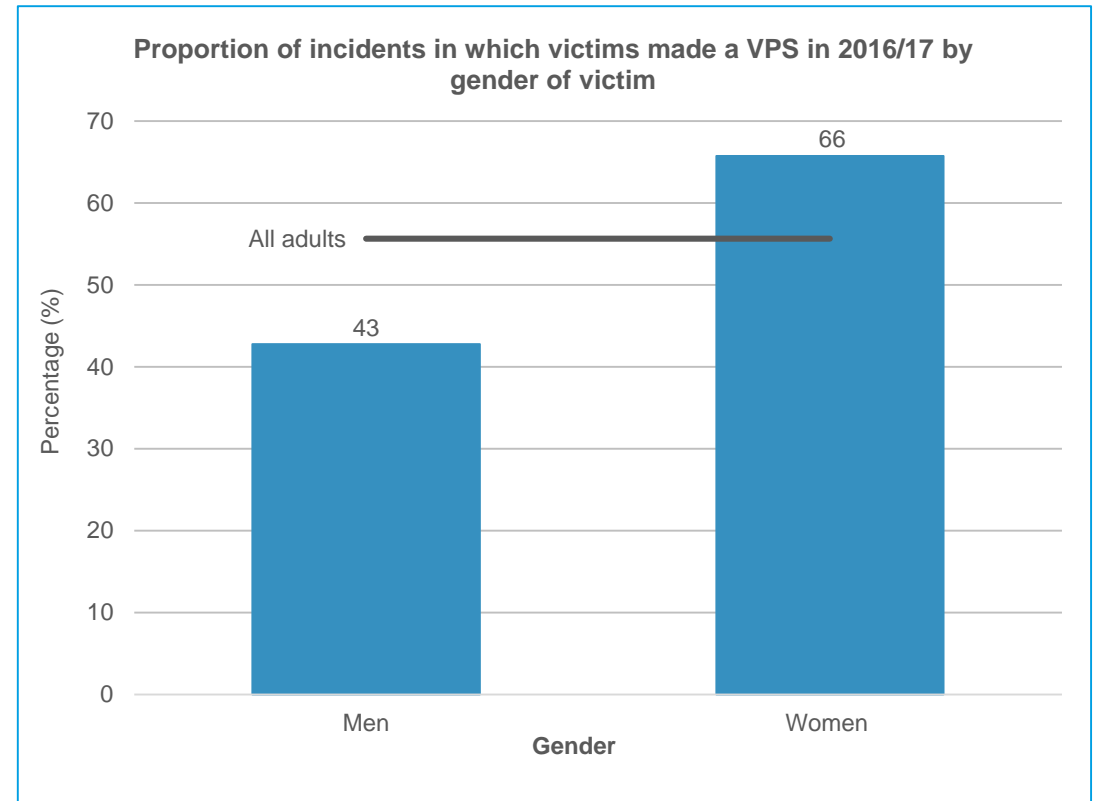
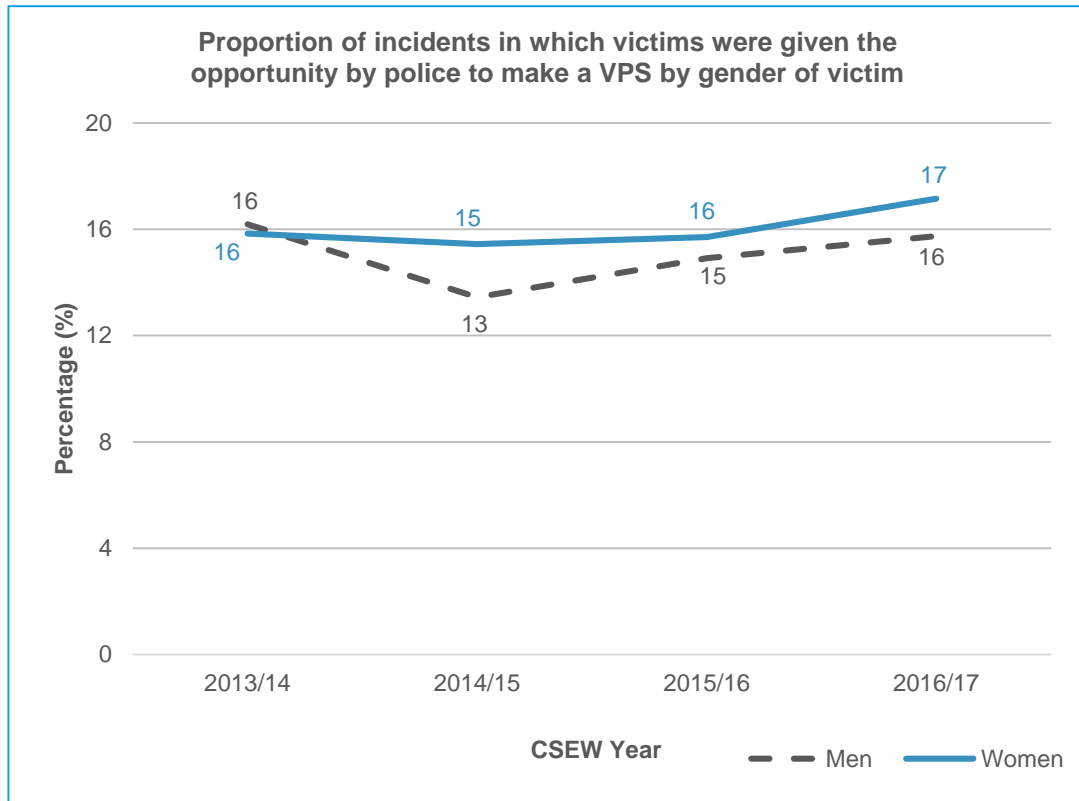
The proportion of incidents where victims aged 55 to 64 years were given the opportunity to make a VPS is lower than all previous years this question had been asked (since 2013/14).

In 2016/17, incidents involving victims aged 16 to 24 years were more likely to involve the offer of making a VPS than observed for all incidents (23% compared to 17%). This is higher than observed for the same age group over the previous 12 months.



Gender

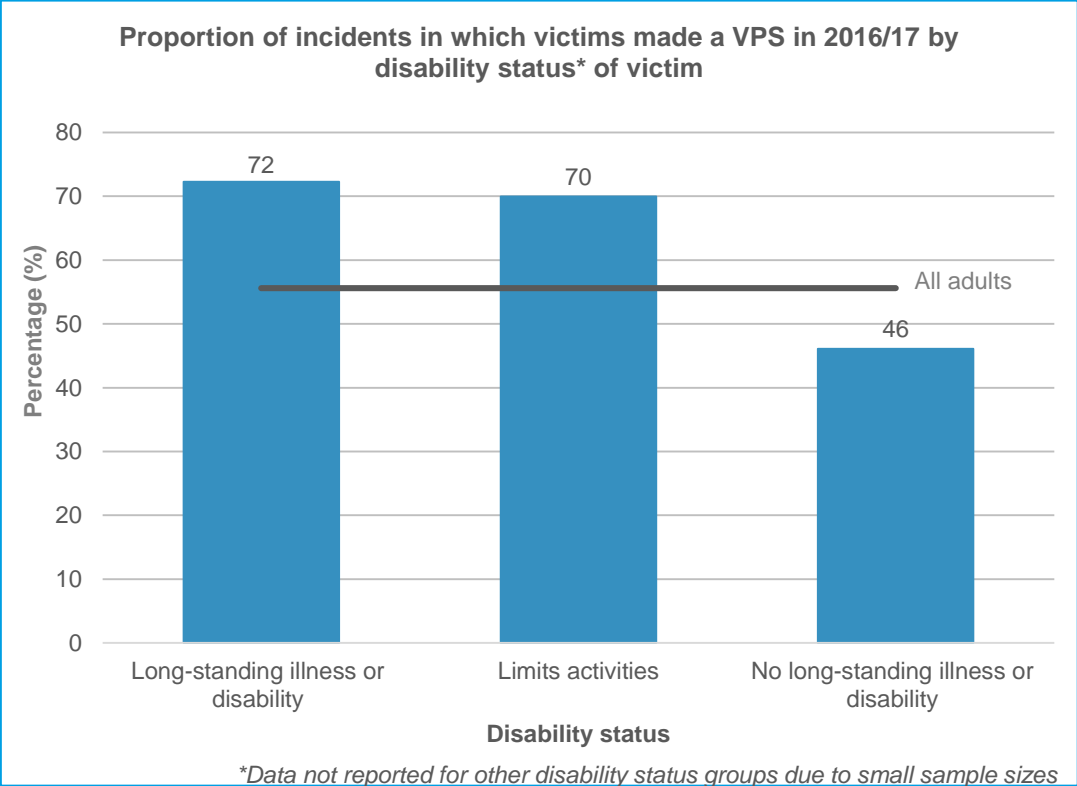
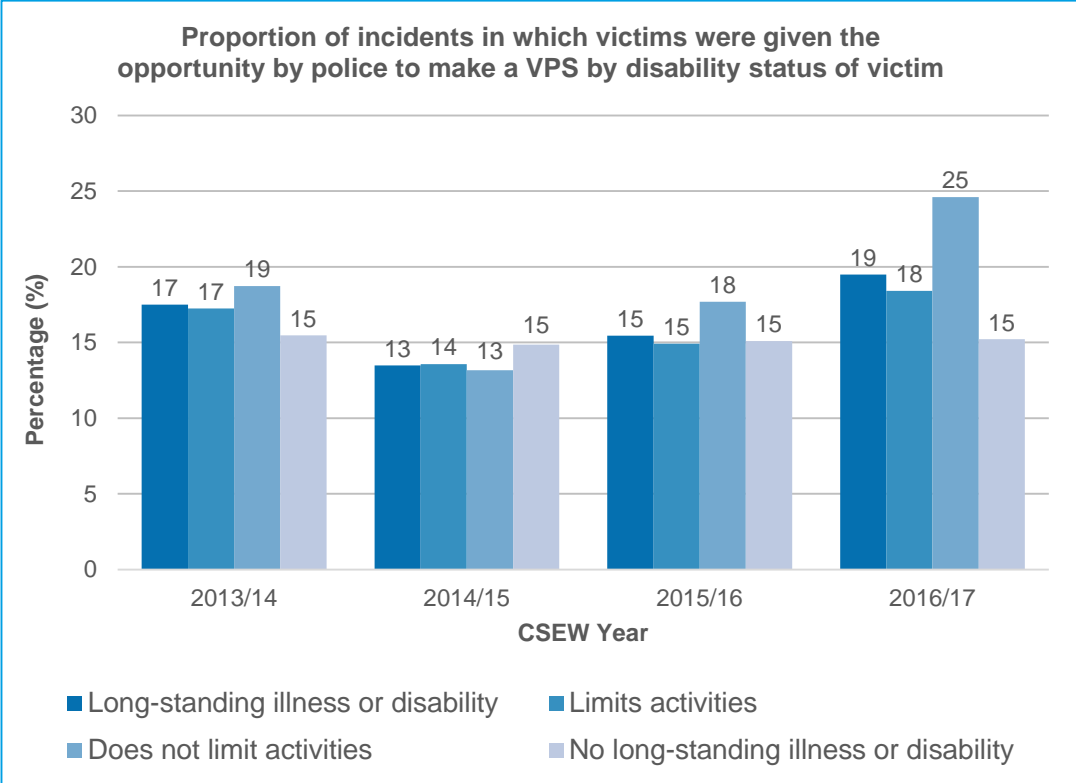
There is no statistically significant difference in the proportion of incidents where a victim was offered the opportunity to make a VPS according to the victims' gender. This has remained consistent over the previous four years.



Although there is no difference in the offer of making a VPS by gender, in 2016/17 male victims were less likely to make a VPS when offered compared with all incidents. Just over 2 in 5 (43%) incidents saw the male victim make a VPS compared to over half of incidents involving all victims (56%). Incidents with female victims were 10 per cent more likely (66%) to involve the victim making a VPS when this had been offered compared with incidents involving all victims (56%).

Long-standing illness or disability

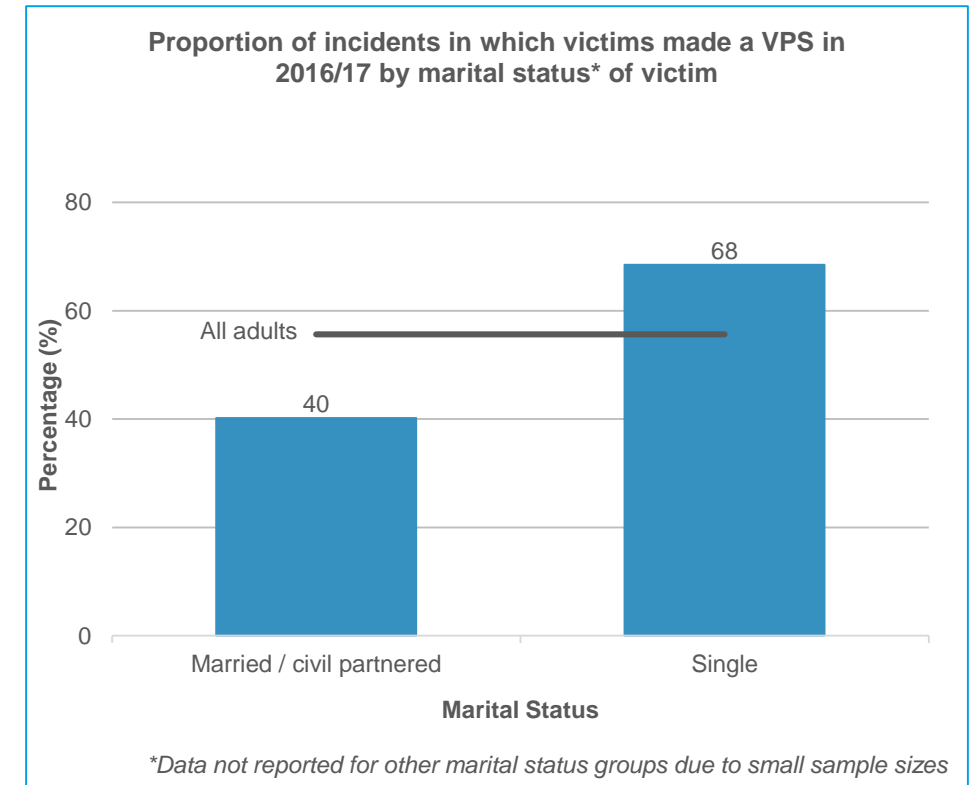
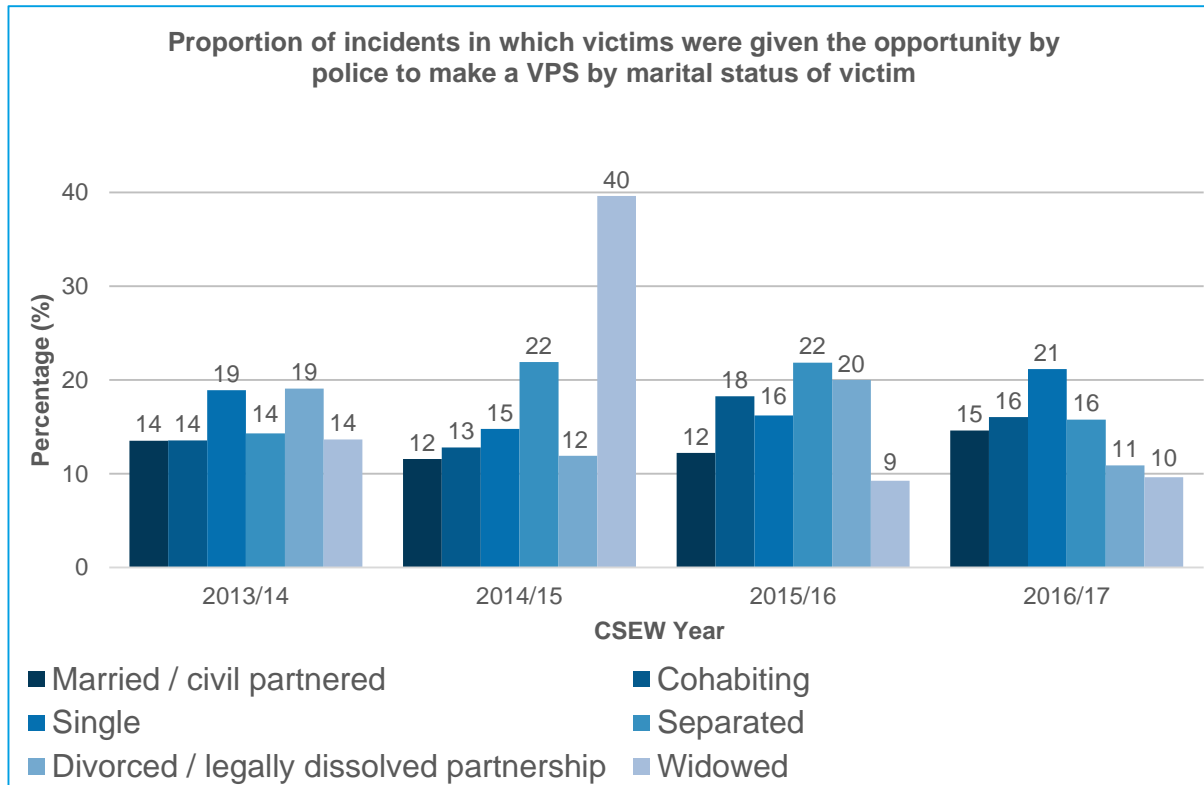
In 2016/17, the proportion of incidents where a victim was offered the chance to make a VPS was greater for victims who had a long-standing illness or disability, than for all incidents (19% compared to 17% for all incidents). This is likely to have been influenced by the fact that victims who have a long-standing illness or disability that does not limit their activities were more likely to see the victim offered the opportunity to make a VPS than incidents involving all victims (25% compared to 17%). Incidents involving victims with no illness or disability were marginally less likely to be offered the opportunity to make a VPS than all incidents (15%).



For incidents involving victims with a long-standing illness or disability, and when this illness or disability limits activities, victims were more likely to make a VPS when offered the opportunity compared to all incidents (72% and 70% made a VPS respectively compared to 56%). Incidents with victims who have no long-standing illness or disability were less likely to involve the victim making a VPS than all incidents (46% compared to 56% of all incidents).

Marital Status

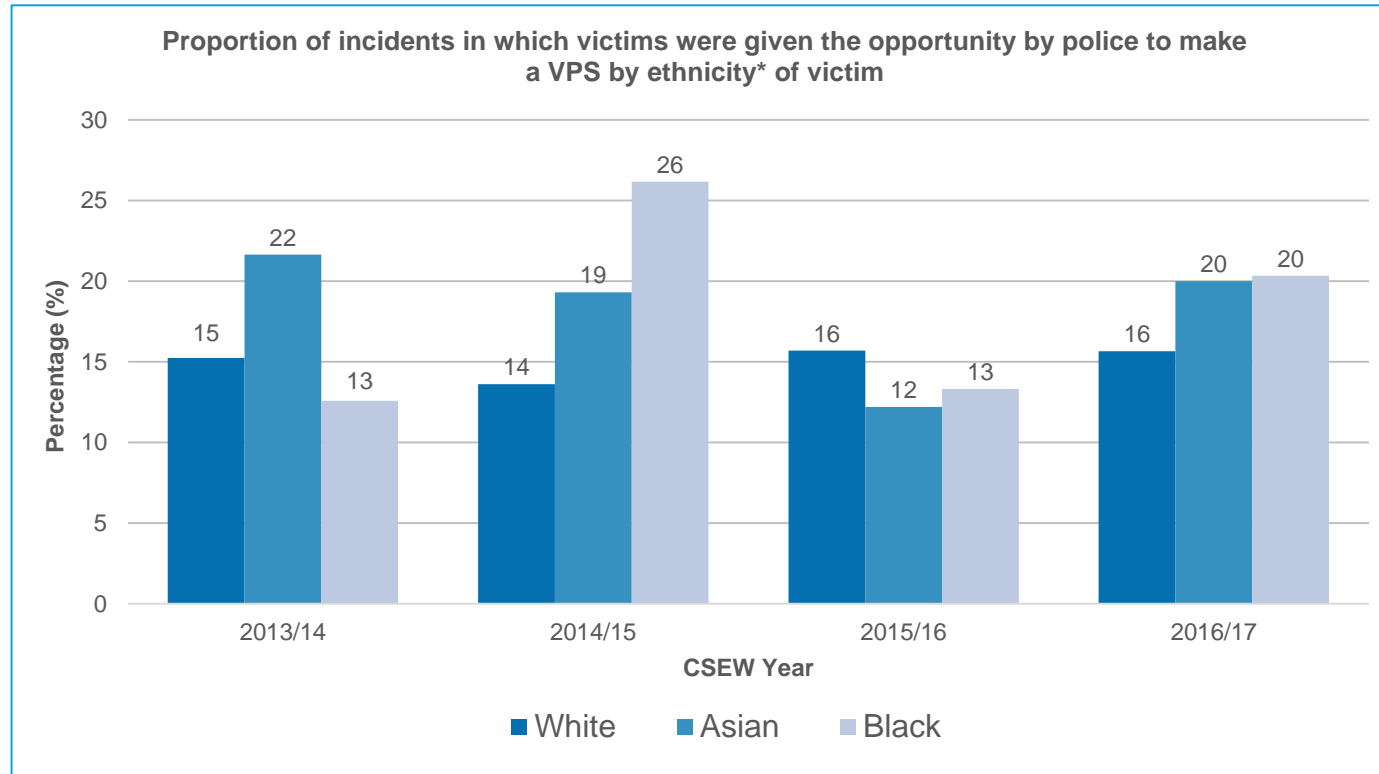
Incidents involving victims who are divorced (11%) or widowed (10%) were less likely to involve the victim being offered the opportunity to make a VPS than incidents involving all victims (17%). This rate is lower for these two groups than in some previous years. Incidents with divorcee victims were less likely to involve a VPS being offered than in 2015/16 and 2013/14 by 9 and 8 percentage points respectively. Incidents involving widowed victims were less likely to involve the offer to make a VPS than in 2014/15 by 30 percentage points. This, however, is likely to be a reflection of the sudden increase in the proportion of widowed victims offered a VPS in 2014/15.



In 2 in 5 (40%) incidents where a victim is married or in a civil partnership, the victim made a VPS when offered the opportunity to do so. This is lower when compared to all incidents (56%), though it has remained consistent with previous years in which this question has been asked.

Ethnicity

In 2016/17 incidents involving victims who are White were marginally less likely to involve the victim being offered the opportunity to make a VPS compared to all incidents (16% compared to 17% of all incidents). There were no significant changes observed when examining this data longitudinally.

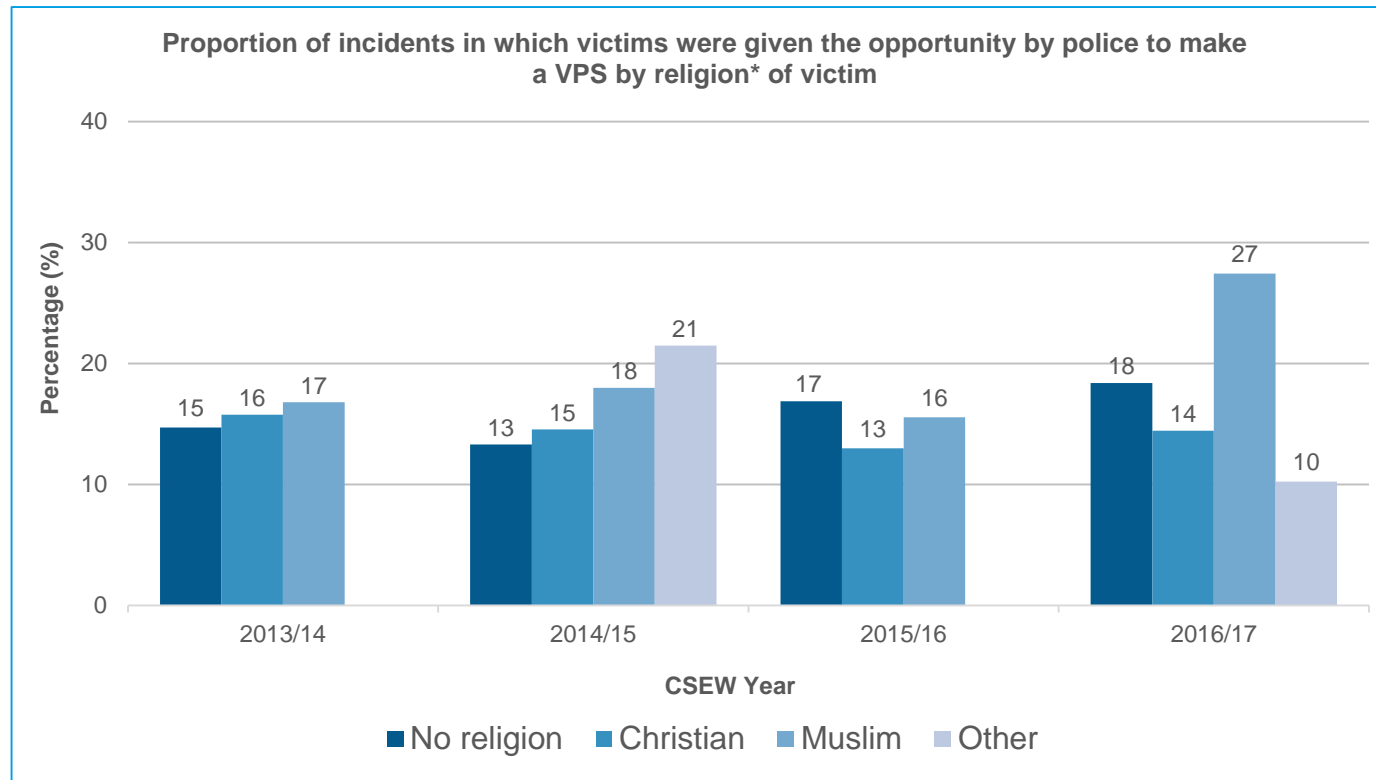


*Data not reported for other ethnic groups due to small sample sizes

Religion

Incidents involving victims who are Christian were less likely to involve the victim being offered the opportunity to make a VPS than incidents involving all victims (14% of incidents compared to 17% of all incidents).

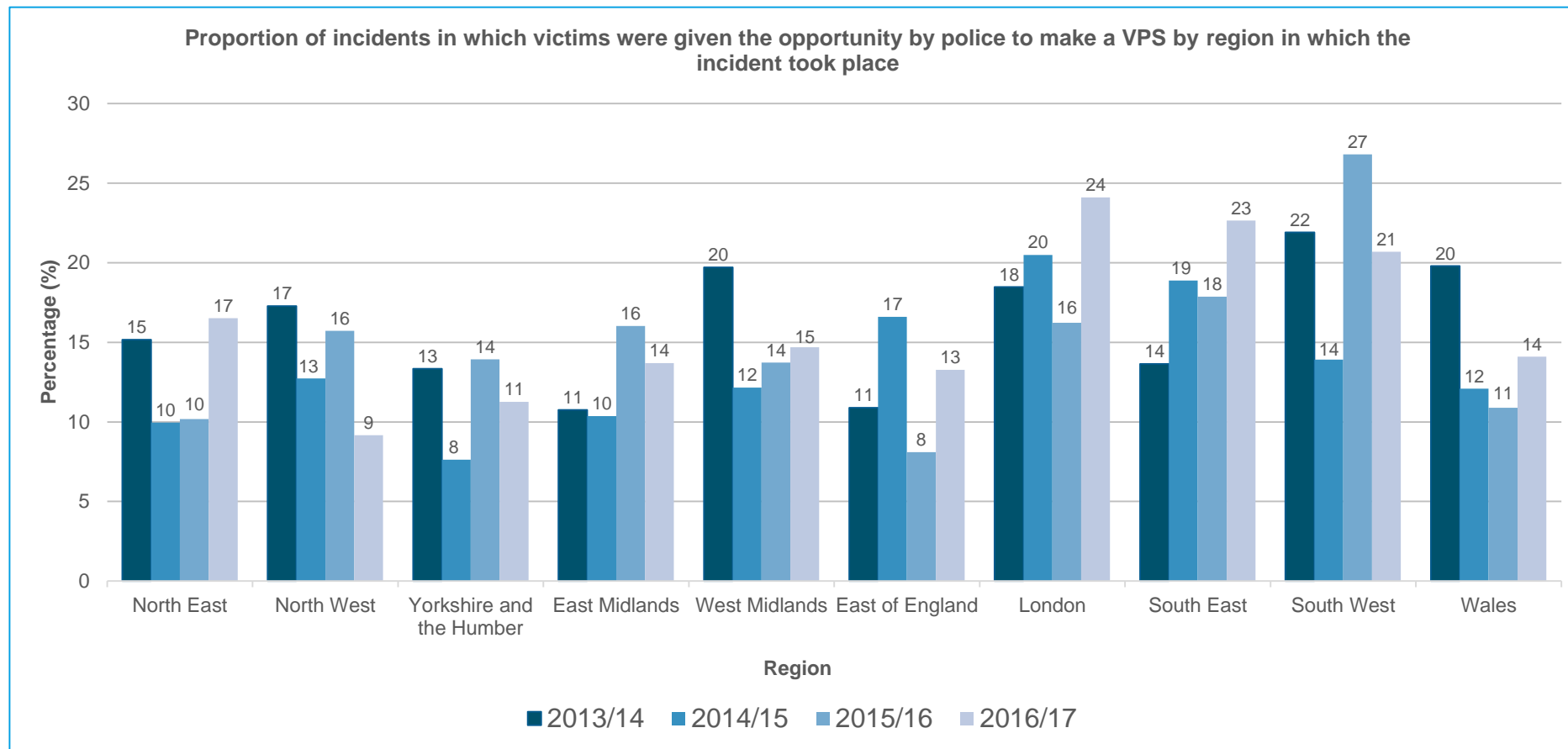
Incidents involving victims of no religion, and Muslim victims, were more likely to see the victim offered the opportunity to make a VPS than incidents involving all victims (18% and 27% respectively compared to 17%). This has increased for incidents involving victims of no religion from 2014/15 and 2013/14. For incidents involving Muslim victims this has increased from the previous 12 months (2015/16).



**Data not reported for other religious groups due to small sample sizes*

Region

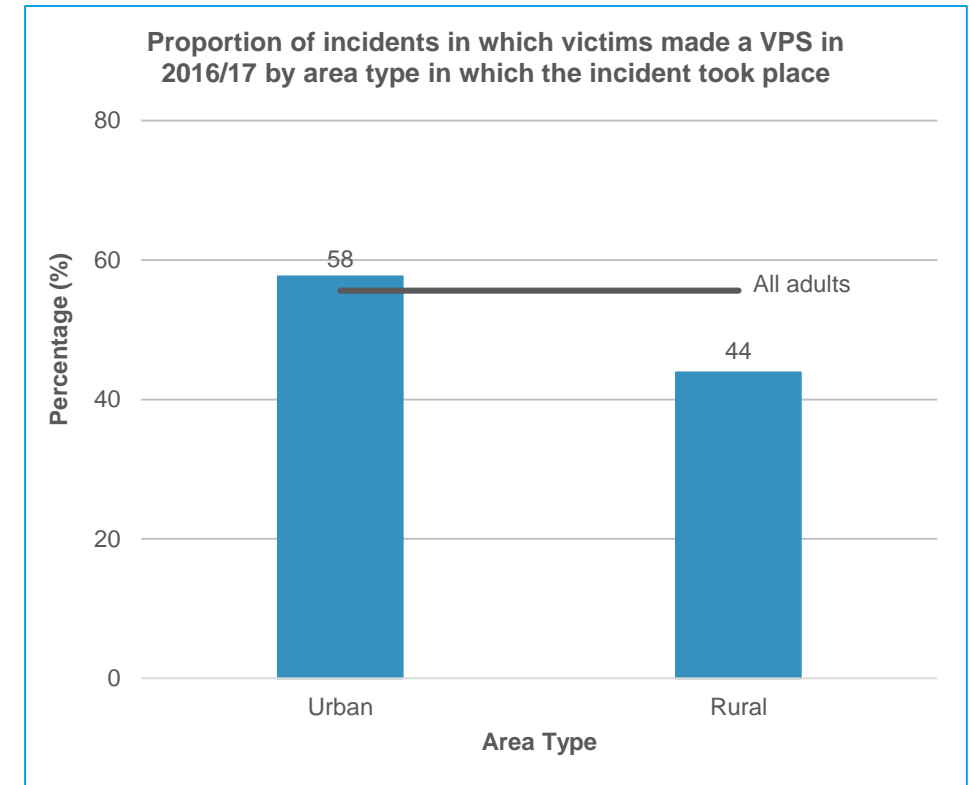
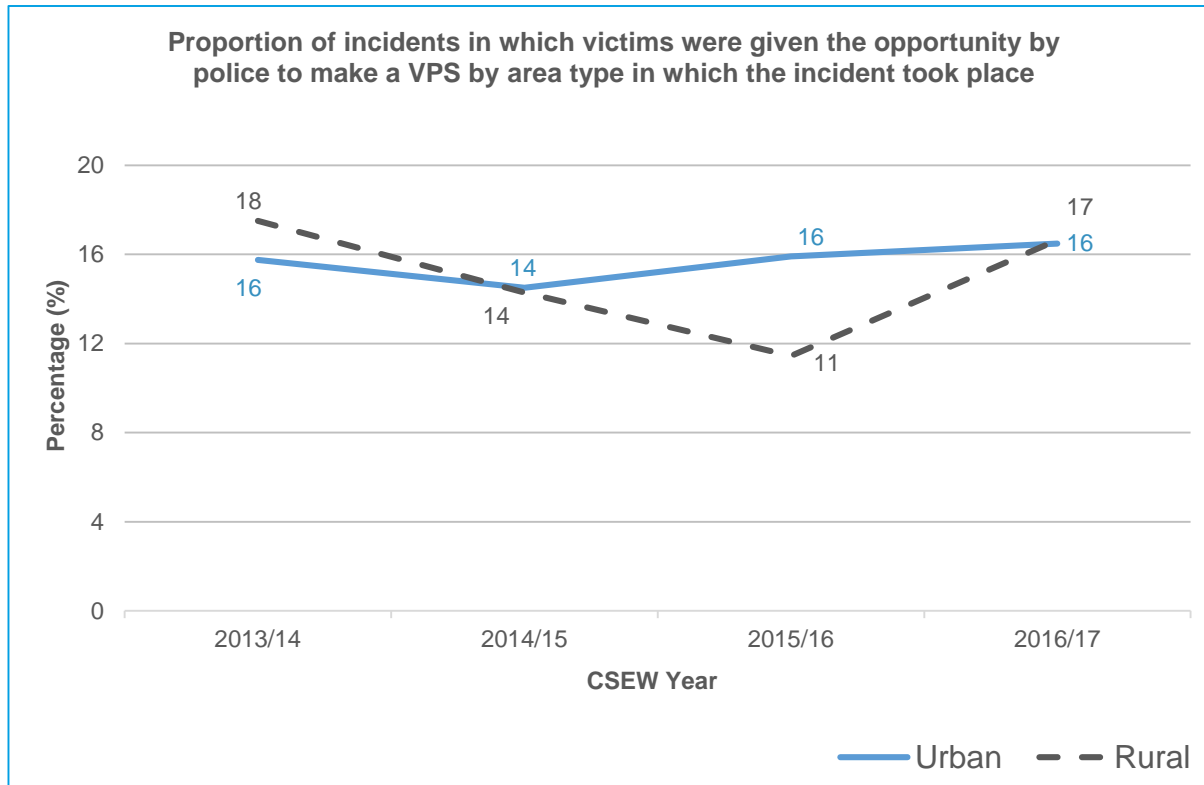
In 2016/17, for incidents in the North West of England and in Yorkshire and the Humber, victims were less likely to be offered the opportunity to make a VPS. In the North West less than 1 in 10 (9%) incidents involved the victim being offered a VPS, whereas in Yorkshire and the Humber this was the case for just over 1 in 10 (11%) incidents. This is in comparison to 1 in 6 (17%) of all incidents. For incidents in the North West the frequency of which victims were offered a VPS has decreased from the previous 12 months from 16% to 9%.



Incidents in London and the South East were more likely to involve the victims being offered the opportunity to make a VPS when compared to all incidents (24% and 23% respectively). For London, and for the East of England, this proportion has increased from the previous 12 months ending March 2016.

Area type

In the 12 months to March 2017 there was no observed difference in the proportion of incidents where a victim was given the opportunity to make a VPS according to the area type in which the incident took place. Incidents that took place in rural areas were, however, more likely to involve the victim being offered the opportunity to make a VPS than in the previous 12 months by 5 percentage points.

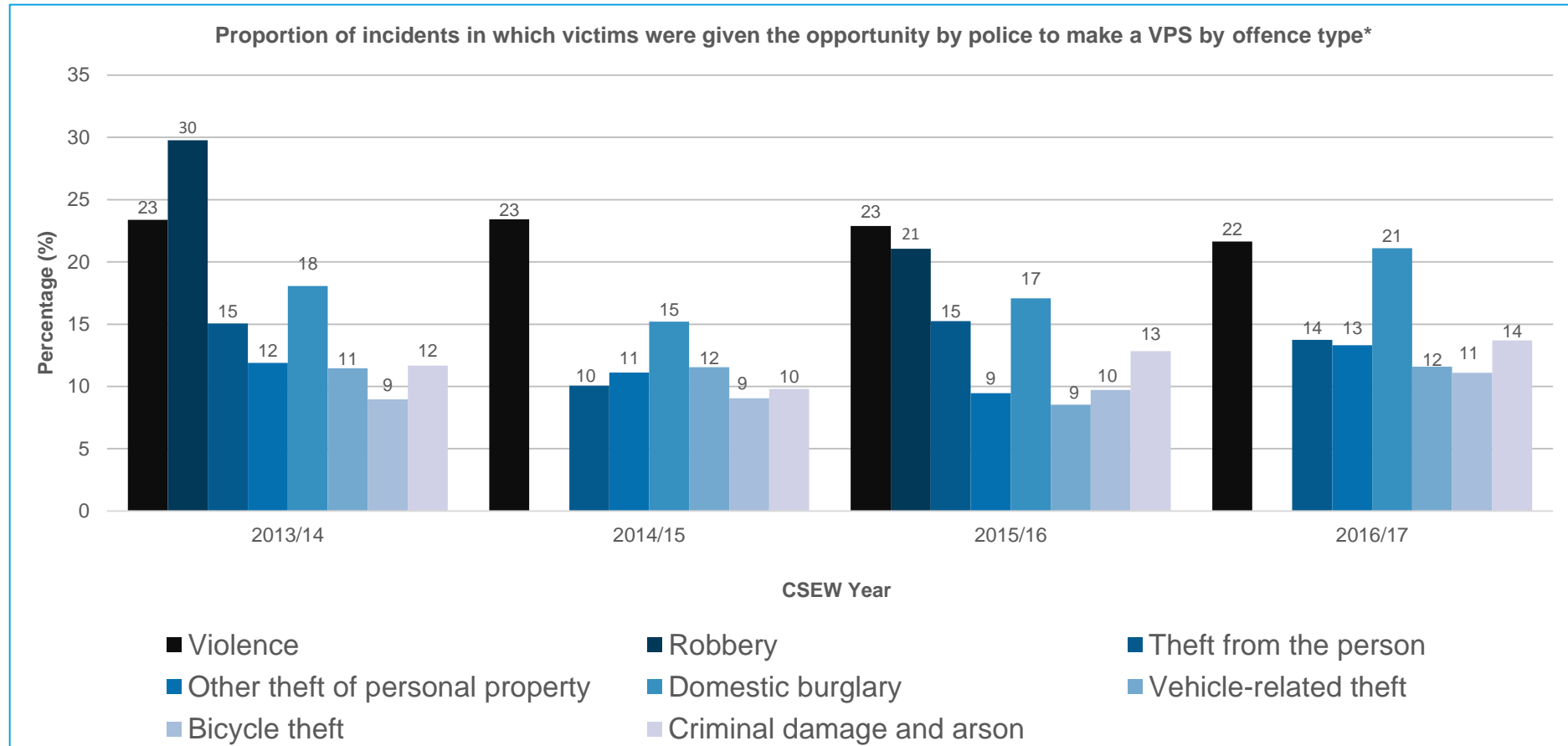


In 2016/17, there were no significant differences in the proportion of incidents in which victims made a VPS when offered, by area type. For incidents that took place in urban areas, these proportions were consistent with previous survey years. Due to small sample sizes, the data could not be examined longitudinally for incidents that took place in rural areas.

Offence (i)

Incidents where victims were subject to vehicle-related theft (12%), bicycle theft (11%) and criminal damage and arson offences (14%) were less likely to involve the victim being offered a VPS than all incidents (17%).

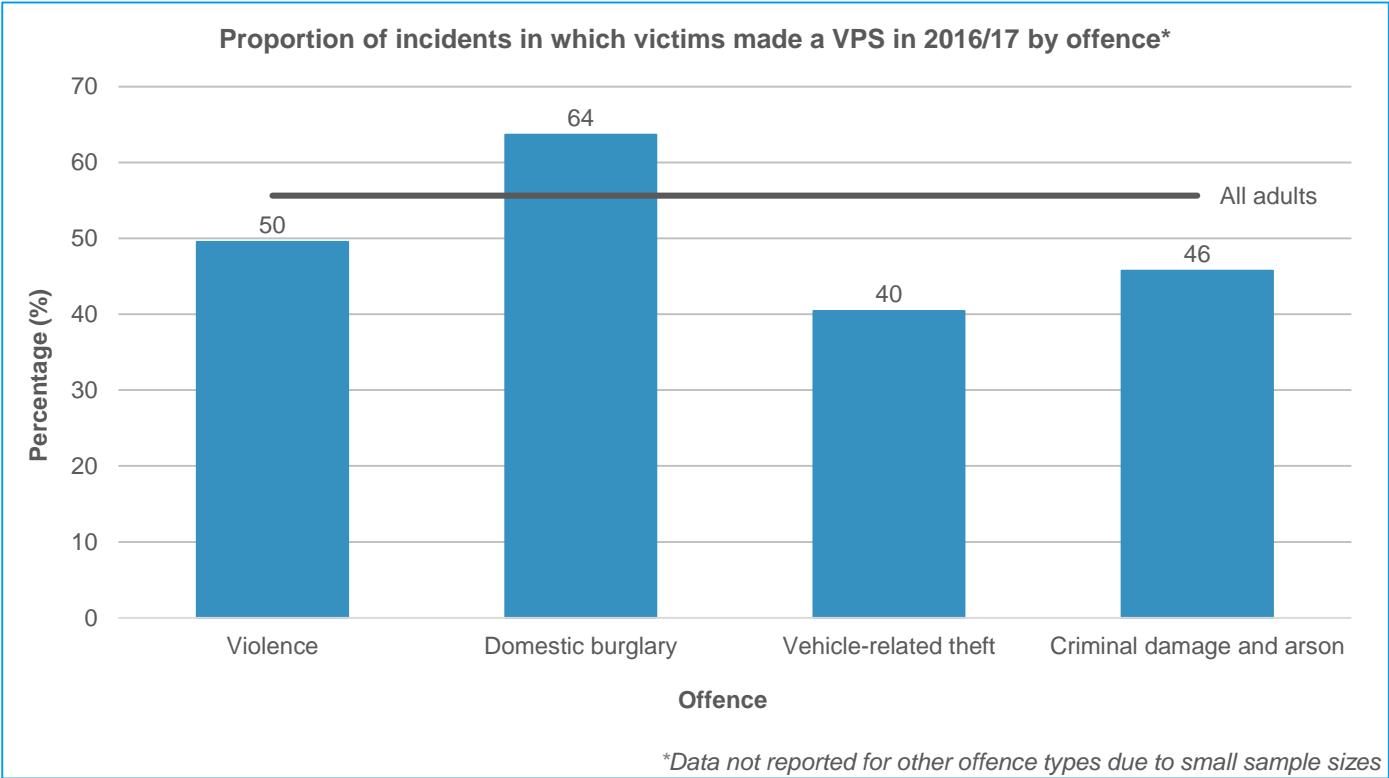
Violence (22%) and domestic burglary (21%) offences were more likely to see the victim offered a VPS compared to all incidents.



*Data not reported for Robbery offences in 2016/17 and 2014/15 due to small sample sizes

Offence (ii)

In 2016/17, fewer incidents of vehicle-related theft involved the victim making a VPS when they have been offered the opportunity to do so when compared to the rate for all incidents. Only 2 in 5 incidents (40%) of vehicle-related theft saw victims make a VPS compared to over half (56%) of incidents overall.



The proportions of incidents for which victims made a VPS for violence offences and criminal damage and arson offences both observed a large decrease in 2016/17 from the previous 12 months. Incidents where victims made a VPS related to a violence offence decreased by 20 percentage points to 50%. Incidents where victims made a VPS related to a criminal damage and arson offence decreased by 28 percentage points to 46%.

Methodology

Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

The CSEW, formerly known as the British Crime Survey (BCS), is a face-to-face survey asking people who are resident in households in England and Wales about their experiences of a range of crimes in the 12 months prior to their interview. The random sample survey interviews both adults and children, though the VPS questions are not included in the survey of children. The survey is conducted on a continuous basis with around 35,000 adults and 3,000 children (aged 10 to 15 years) per year.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has announced that future funding of the CSEW is to be reduced from October 2017. To account for the reduction in funding the ONS have recently outlined that they will be reducing the CSEW sample size for the 2017/18 survey year by 600 households, and will reduce the survey response rate to 71% from October 2017. The ONS have committed to keeping questions related to victims' use of services and experiences of the court system, though some other question modules are being removed.

Statistical Significance Testing

Only differences and changes that are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level have been reported in this review. This means that the probability of any given difference happening by chance is low (at most 1 in 20). However findings should be treated with some caution owing to the small number of CSEW respondents that were asked questions on Victim Personal Statements.

Limitations of the findings

This review does not explore more detailed analysis of the data, for example it does not use regression analysis to establish whether there are any particular demographic characteristics or offence attributes that are likely to be driving the differentiation in the VPS offer that we have observed throughout this review. This is due to the format of the data published by the Office for National Statistics that is available for this review.