

Victim Personal Statements 2017/18

Analysis of the offer and take-up of Victim Personal Statements using the Crime Survey for England and Wales, April 2013 to March 2018.

Foreword



A Victim Personal Statement (VPS) is one of the key entitlements available to victims in the Victims' Code of Practice. It offers victims the opportunity to express how the crime has affected their lives physically, emotionally, financially or in any other way.

Importantly, the VPS is articulated in the victim's own words. I have long supported this entitlement as an opportunity for victims to have a voice in the criminal justice system and to be heard.

This is my fourth report examining data available on the VPS from the Crime Survey for England and Wales. These annual reports give me an insight into the provision and take-up of this important entitlement. They follow a review I conducted in 2015, which made several recommendations for the government and heads of criminal justice agencies on how to improve the VPS process.

My report examines the provision and take-up of the VPS for the year ending March 2018. It scrutinises these aspects overall, as well as when broken down by demographic characteristics. It uses a longitudinal approach where possible, to establish whether provision has improved, worsened, or if it is unchanged from previous years.

I am disappointed to report that the data reveals little progress being made since 2013/14. In terms of the proportion of victims offered the opportunity to make a VPS by police, only one in six victims were offered this opportunity. Yet more than half of victims who were offered a VPS chose to make one, and of those who did make a VPS, the majority felt it had been taken into account by the criminal justice system.

There continues to be certain demographic groups who are less likely to be offered the opportunity to make a VPS. Here, I found discrepancies by age, religion, marital status, long-term illness/disability, area type, region and offence. Overall, these figures reiterate the importance of the VPS to those who make one, and how ensuring a VPS is offered to all victims is crucial.

I welcome the recent publication of the Government's Victims' Strategy and the proposed action to record and monitor when a VPS has been made. However, my report demonstrates yet again that victim entitlements are not always taken seriously. This is why I am calling for a Victims' Law, which includes statutory rights for victims of crime, including the right to be informed, to be heard and to challenge. While Victim Personal Statements give victims the opportunity to be heard, they only become a reality if victims are informed of their entitlement to make one and if the purpose of the VPS is clearly explained to them.

For too long, too many victims are not getting the opportunity to have their voices heard. A Victims' Law can transform this and drive positive change for victims across the criminal justice system.

Baroness Newlove

Headline findings

- **Few victims report that they are offered the opportunity to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) and this has remained consistent since this topic was first included in the Crime Survey for England and Wales five years ago.**
 - In 2017/18 victims were given the opportunity to make a VPS by Police in approximately every 1 in 6 incidents (16% of all incidents).
- **Overall, victims are no more or less likely to make a VPS than in previous years.**
 - In over half of all incidents (57%) where victims were given the opportunity to make a VPS by Police, victims decided to do so.
- **Few victims who make a VPS have it read aloud in court. Some victims, who reported that their VPS was not read aloud in court, said they wanted it to have been.**
 - Just under 1 in 5 incidents (19%) where victims made a VPS, their statement was read aloud in court.
 - Where victims had not had their VPS read aloud, victims in a quarter of these incidents (25%) stated that they had said they wanted it to be read aloud. The reasons behind this figure are not clear.
- **While the proportion of incidents where victims felt that their VPS had been taken into account by the Criminal Justice System was higher in 2017/18 than in 2015/16, it also remained consistent with levels first reported in 2013/14.**
 - For approximately 7 in 10 incidents (68%), 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 certain 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 2017/18, incidents with victims aged 35 to 44 years were slightly less likely to involve the victim being 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.

- **Sex**

- There were no significant differences between the proportions of men and women who were offered the opportunity to make a VPS in 2017/18 when compared to the average across all incidents. Men were, however, less likely to make a VPS when offered the opportunity to do so.

- **Ethnicity**

- In 2017/18, there were no significant differences observed between the average across all incidents and incidents involving victims of different ethnic groups.

- **Religion**

- Incidents in which the victim identifies as Christian were marginally less likely to see the victim offered a VPS than the average across all incidents.

- **Marital status**

- In incidents where the victim is married or in a civil partnership, victims were less likely to be given the opportunity to make a VPS than for incidents overall. Incidents where victims are single were more likely to see the victim offered a VPS when compared to the overall average.

Key findings by characteristic (ii)

- **Long-standing illness or disability**
 - In incidents where the victim is without a long-standing illness or disability, victims were marginally less likely to be offered the opportunity to make a VPS in 2017/18 when compared to all incidents. Incidents with victims who have a long-standing illness or disability were more likely to be offered a VPS.
- **Area Type**
 - In 2017/18, incidents occurring in urban areas were marginally more likely to involve the victim being offered a VPS in comparison to incidents with all victims. Conversely, incidents occurring in rural areas were proportionately less likely to see the victim offered the opportunity to make a VPS.
- **Region**
 - For incidents that took place in the North East and in the East of England, victims were less likely to be offered a VPS when compared to incidents overall. Incidents in the West Midlands were more likely to involve the victim being offered a VPS.
- **Offence**
 - Incidents where victims were subject to vehicle-related 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 has 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 continued 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. While the Crime Survey for England and Wales only asks about VPS offered by the police, victims who have opted into the Victim Contact Scheme are also entitled to make a VPS at a parole hearing.
- Once a VPS is completed and signed, it cannot be changed or withdrawn – although 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, 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)

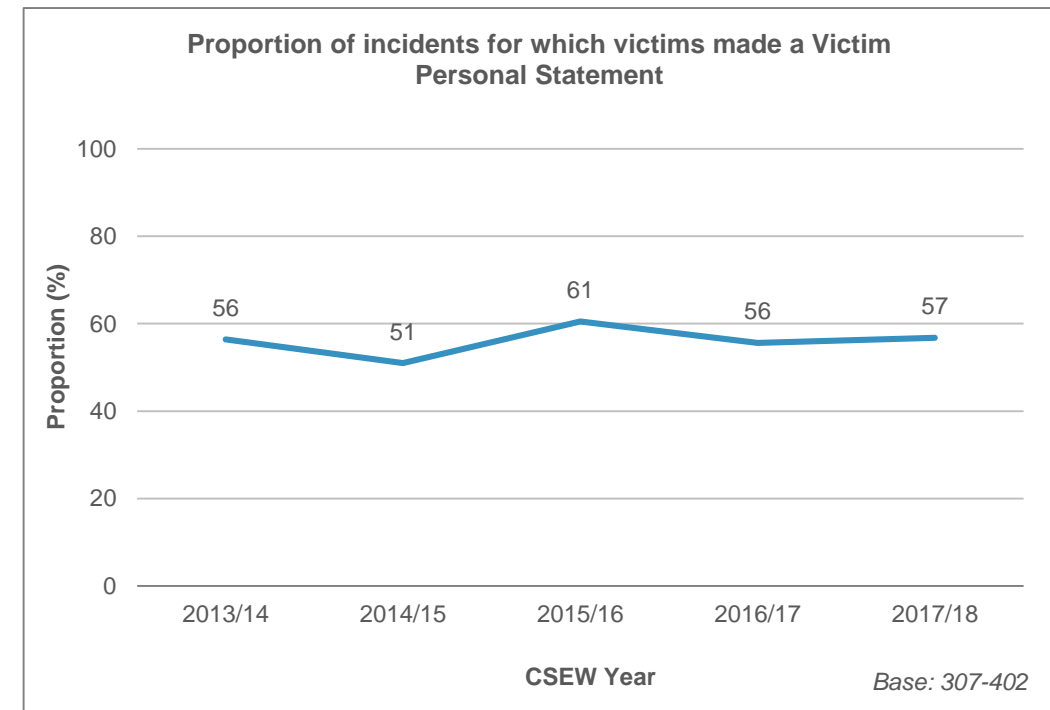
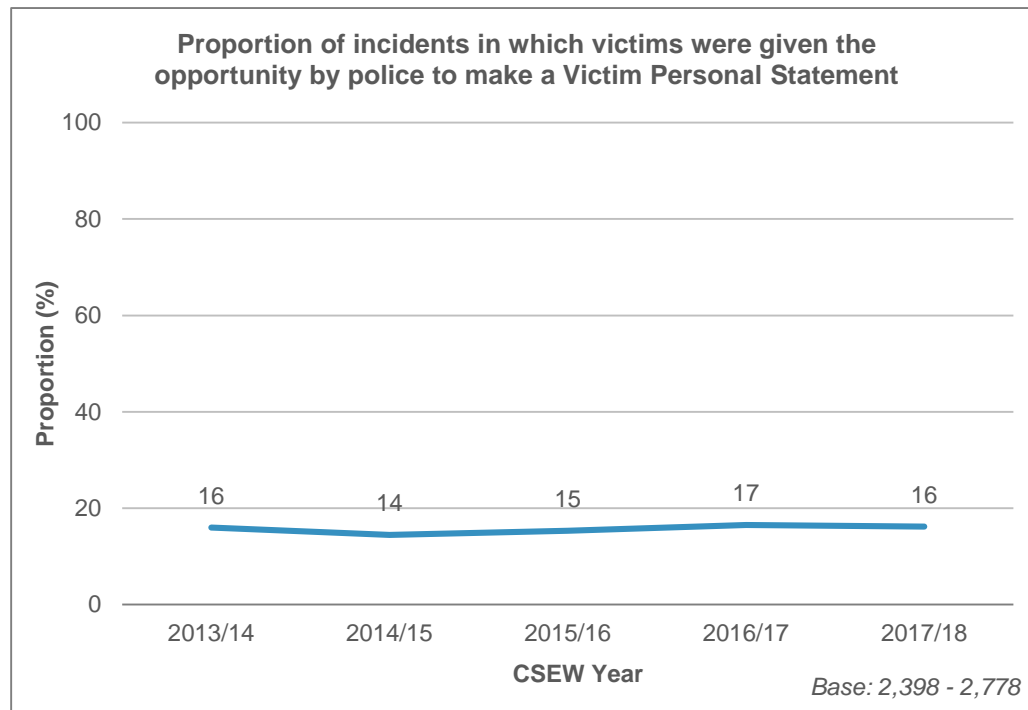
- This review looks at the questions in the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) outlined in the table below. The table also sets out the number of individuals who were asked this question in the survey (the unweighted survey base). This means the number asked these questions before any weights 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	2017/18 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	2,414
Did you make a Victim Personal Statement?	402	307	345	335	325
Was your Victim Personal Statement read aloud in court?	Not asked	Not asked	164	147	145
Did you say you wanted your Victim Personal Statement read aloud in court?	Not asked	Not asked	127	113	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	133

All incidents (i)

In 2017/18, in 1 in 6 incidents (16%) victims were offered the opportunity to make a VPS by the police. There remains no significant change in the proportion of victims offered this opportunity when compared to previous years.

In over half (57%) of incidents where victims were given the opportunity to make a VPS, the victim did so. Again, the proportion who chose to make a VPS is consistent with previous years.



All incidents (ii)

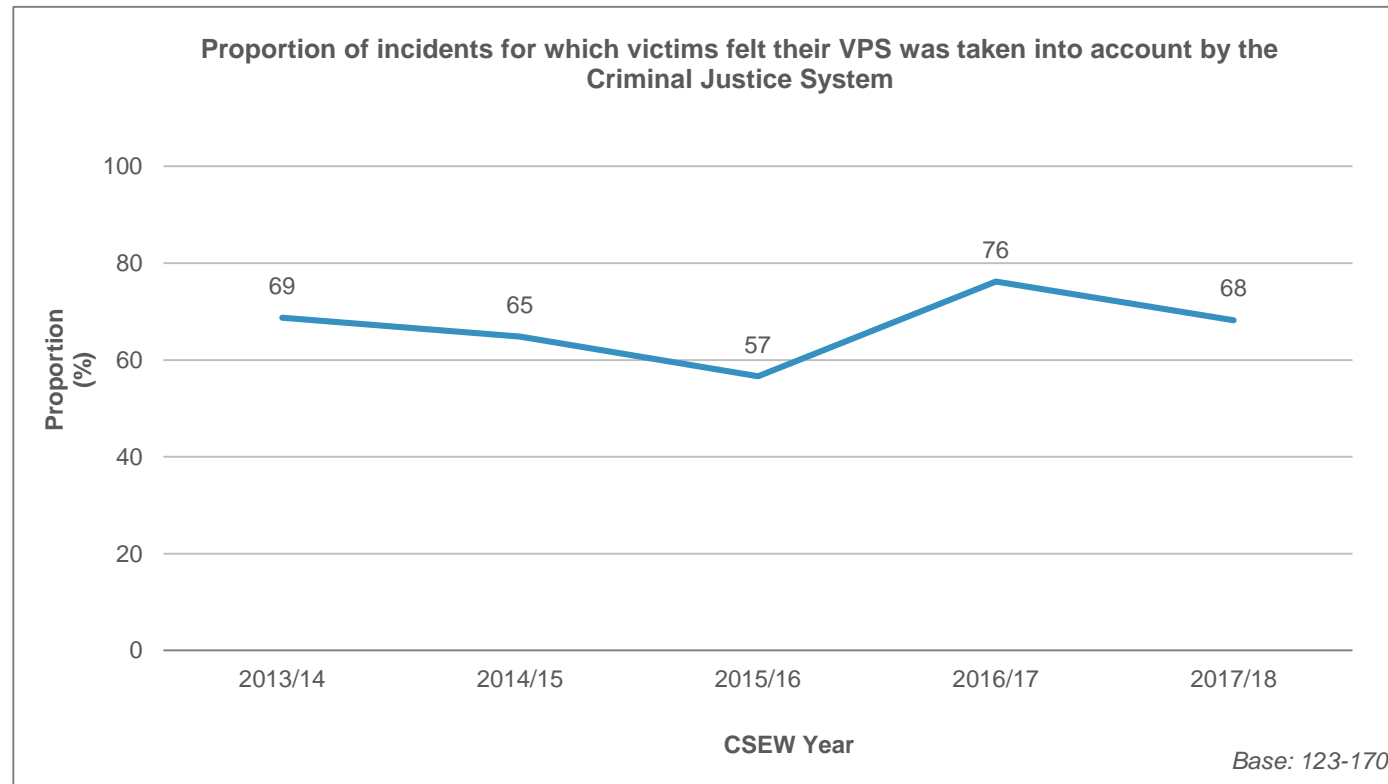
In 2017/18, in approximately 1 in 5 (19%) incidents where victims made a VPS, this statement was then read aloud in court. There was no significant change in this proportion from previous years.

In the same year, in a quarter of incidents where victims did not have their VPS read aloud in court (25%), these victims had said that they wanted their VPS to be read out. This remains consistent with the levels recorded in the two previous years this question had been asked.



All incidents (iii)

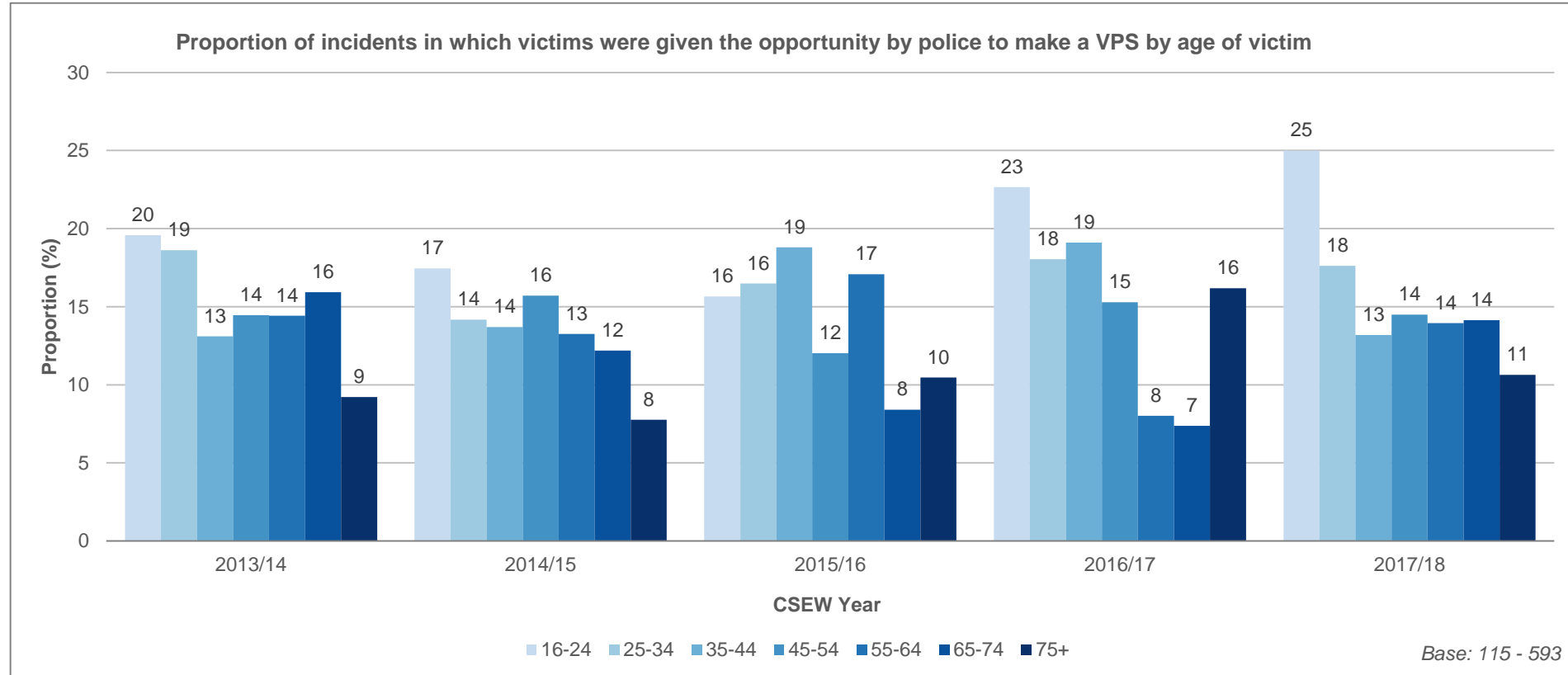
In 2017/18, the proportion of incidents in which victims felt that their VPS had been taken into account is higher than in the year ending March 2016 (at 68% compared to 57%). Overall, however, it remains consistent with all other levels recorded since 2013/14, when this question was first introduced.



Age

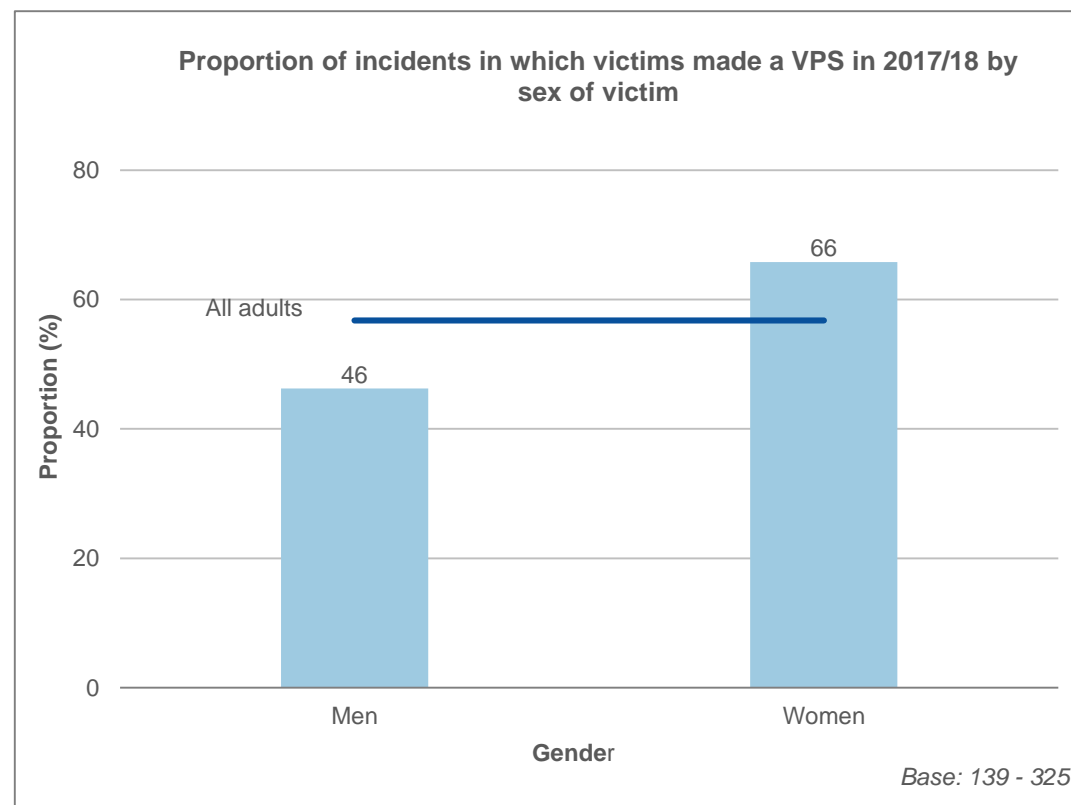
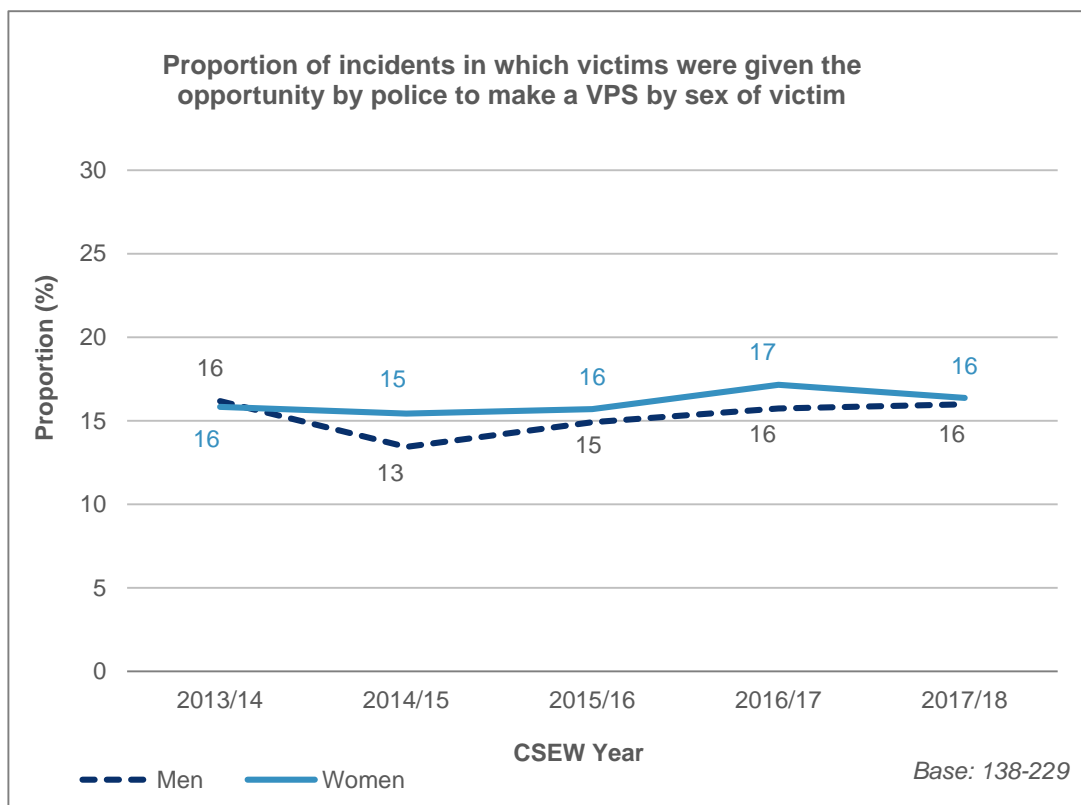
In 2017/18, incidents involving victims aged 16 to 24 years were more likely to include the victim being offered the opportunity to make a VPS than observed for all incidents (25% compared to 16%). This is consistent with the previous year but higher than observed for the same age group in 2015/16 and 2014/15. Incidents with victims aged 35 to 44 years were slightly less likely to involve the victim being offered the opportunity to make a VPS compared with incidents overall (13% compared to 16% of all incidents). This was slightly lower than in the previous two years (2016/17 and 2015/16).

The proportion of incidents where victims were aged 55 to 64 years and were given the opportunity to make a VPS was higher than in 2016/17 by six percentage points, however, it was not significantly different to the average across all incidents in 2017/18. The proportion of incidents involving victims aged 65 to 74 years, was higher than in 2016/17 and 2015/16, but again this was not significantly different to the 2017/18 average across all incidents.



Sex

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' sex. This has remained consistent over the five years this question has been included in the survey.

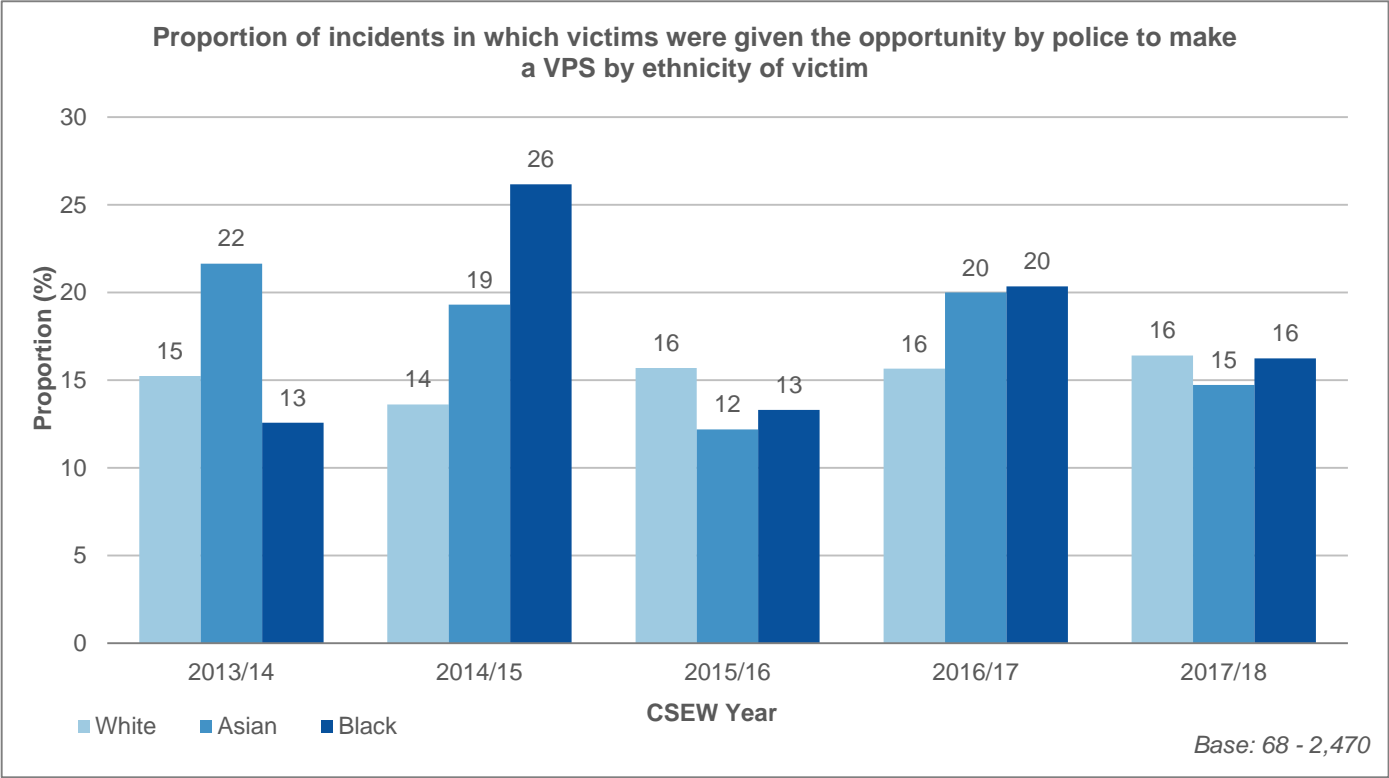


Although there is no difference in the offer of making a VPS by sex, in 2017/18 male victims were less likely to make a VPS when offered compared with all incidents. Over 2 in 5 (46%) incidents saw the male victim make a VPS compared to over half of incidents involving all victims (57%). Incidents involving female victims were more likely (66%) to involve the victim making a VPS when this had been offered compared with incidents involving all victims. This was also significantly higher than in 2014/15 and 2013/14 (66% compared to 54% and 56% respectively).

Ethnicity

In 2017/18 there were no significant differences observed between the overall average and incidents involving victims of different ethnic groups.

Incidents involving victims who are White were marginally more likely to involve the victim being offered the opportunity to make a VPS compared to the same group in 2014/15 (16% in contrast to 14%), however this proportion remains consistent with all previous years, and the average across all incidents for 2017/18. There were no other significant changes observed when examining this data longitudinally.

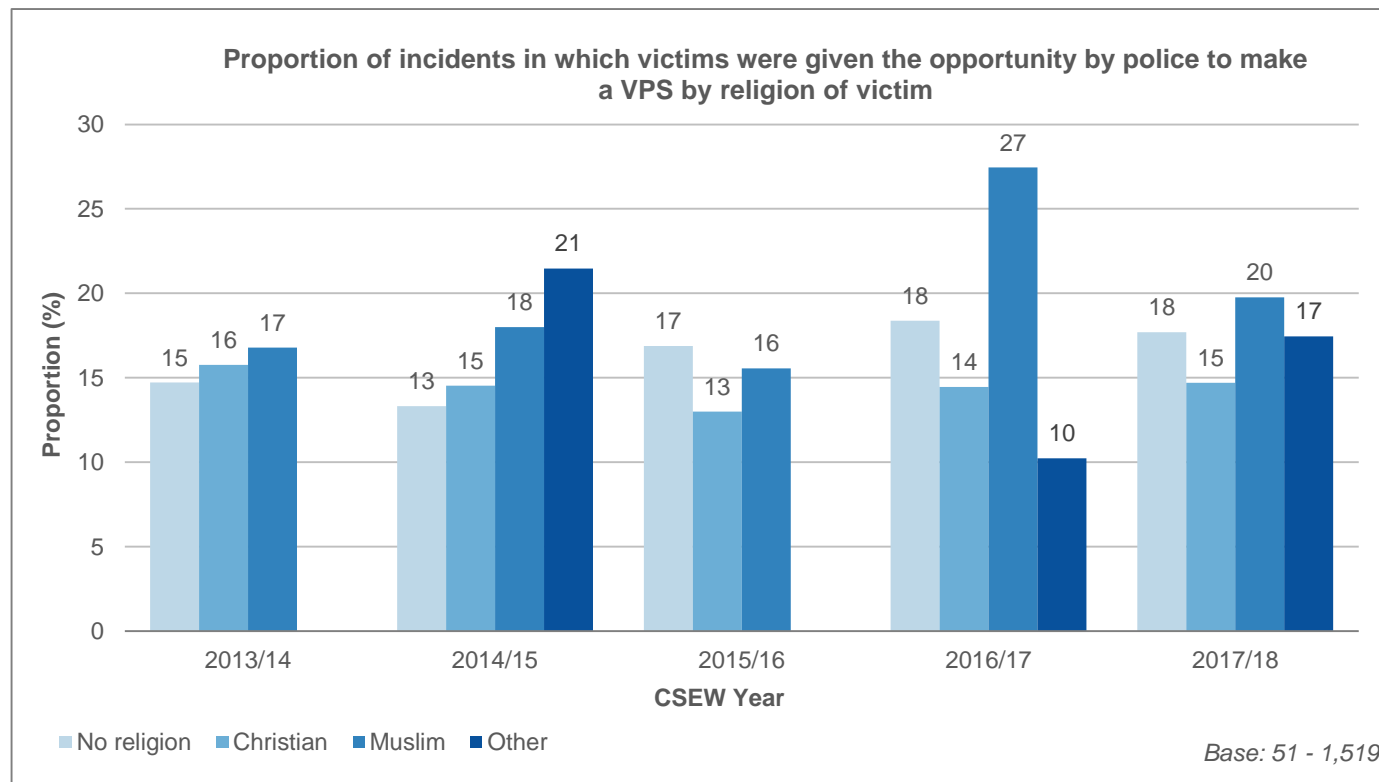


*Data not reported for other ethnic groups due to small sample sizes

Religion

Incidents involving victims who are Christian were marginally less likely to involve the victim being offered the opportunity to make a VPS than incidents involving all victims (15% of incidents compared to 16% of all incidents).

While consistent with the average across all incidents in 2017/18, incidents involving victims of no religion were more likely to see the victim offered the opportunity to make a VPS than the same group in 2014/15 by four percentage pointsⁱ. The proportion has, however, remained consistent with all other years this question has been asked.



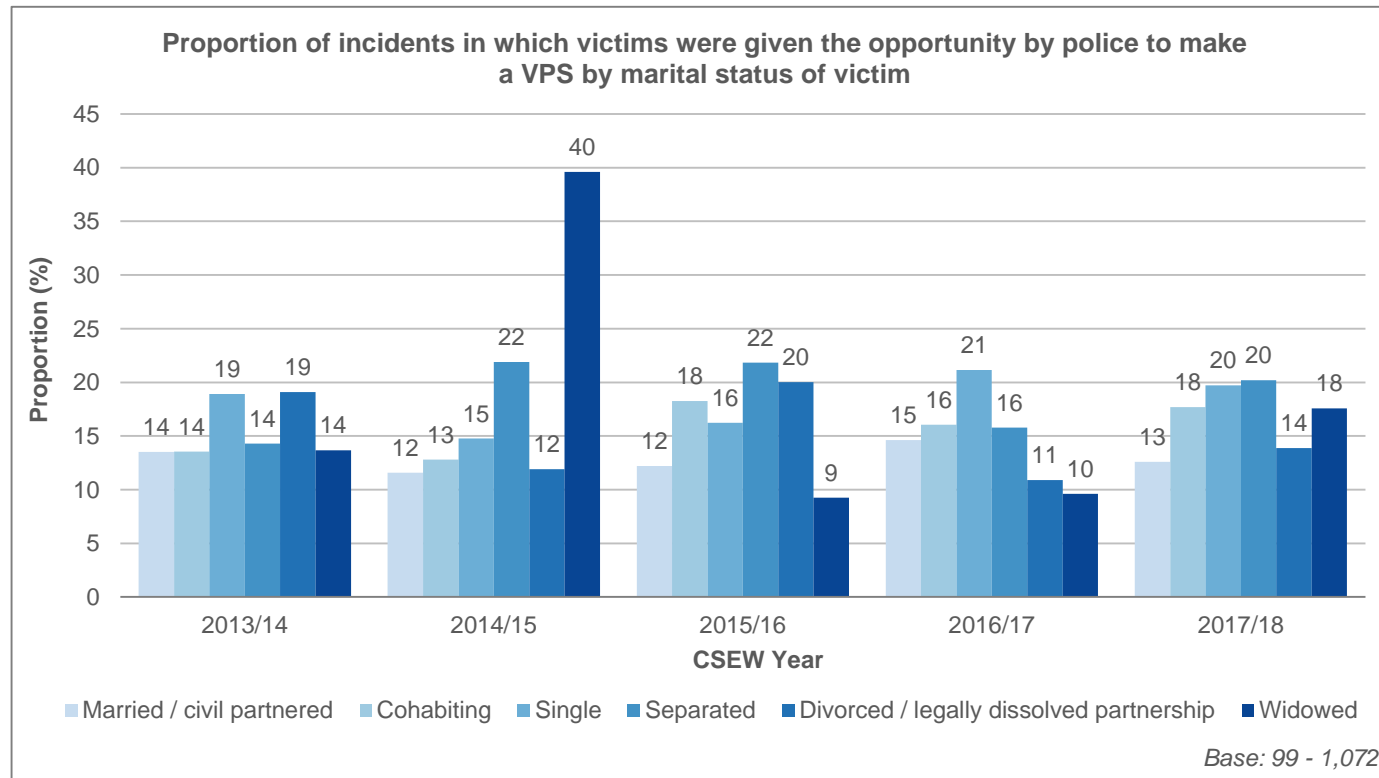
**Data not reported for other religious groups due to small sample sizes*

ⁱVariation from the difference between figures included on the graph due to rounding.

Marital Status

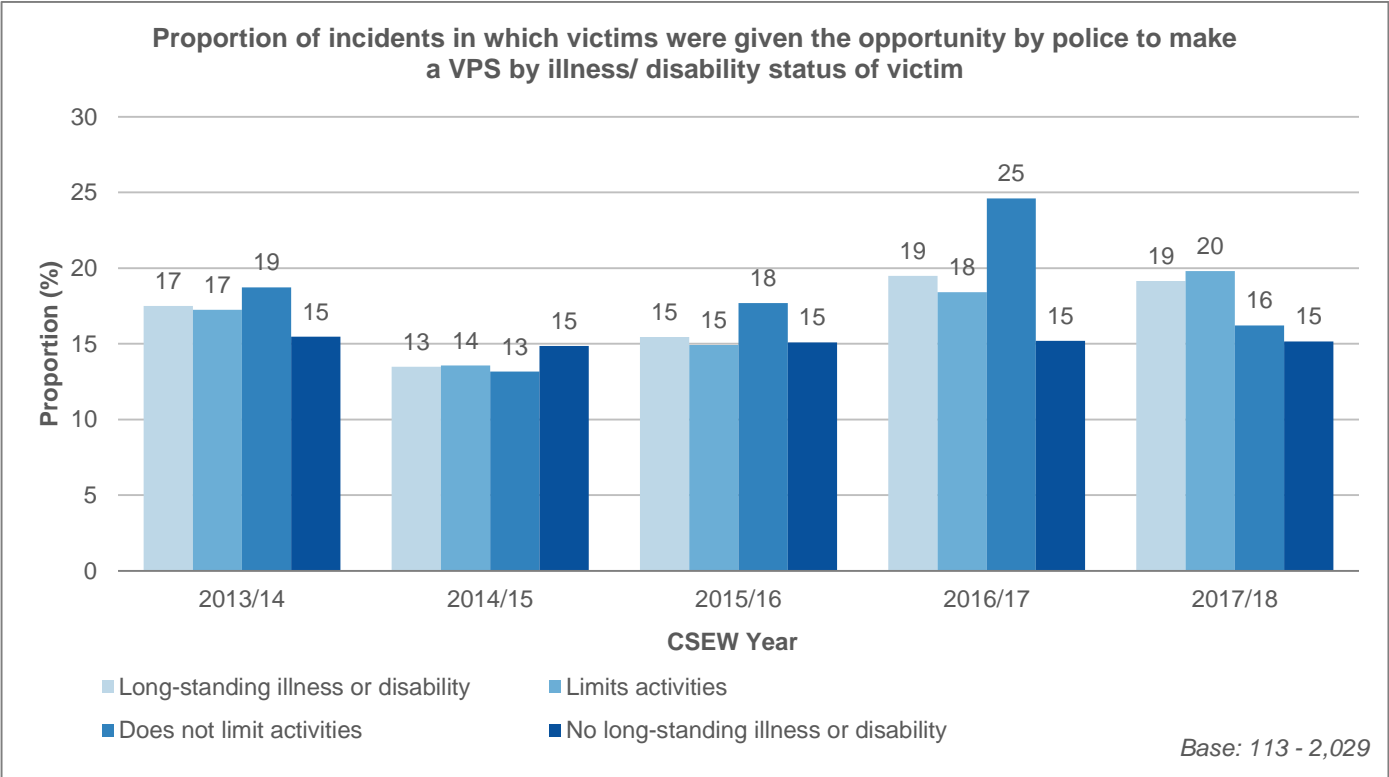
Incidents involving victims who are married / in a civil partnership (13%) were less likely to involve the victim being offered the opportunity to make a VPS than incidents involving all victims (16%). This level is consistent with all previous years this question has been asked. Incidents where victims are single were more likely to involve the victim being offered the opportunity to make a VPS than incidents involving all victims (20% compared to 16%). This was significantly higher than in 2014/15 (20% compared to 15%), though it remains consistent with all other previous years this question has been included in the survey.

Incidents involving victims who are widowed (18%) were less likely to involve the victim being offered the opportunity to make a VPS than they were in 2014/15 by 22 percentage points. Similar to last year, however, this is likely to be a reflection of the sudden increase in the proportion of widowed victims offered a VPS in 2014/15.



Long-standing illness or disability

In 2017/18, incidents involving victims who had a long-standing illness or disability were more likely to see the victim offered the chance to make a VPS by police than the average across all incidents (19% compared to 16% for all incidents). This is likely to have been influenced by incidents where victims have a long-standing illness or disability that limits activities, whereby the proportion of incidents where a VPS was offered was also greater than the average across all incidents (20%). Incidents involving victims without a long-standing illness or disability were marginally less likely to involve the victim being offered a VPS when compared to all incidents (15%).



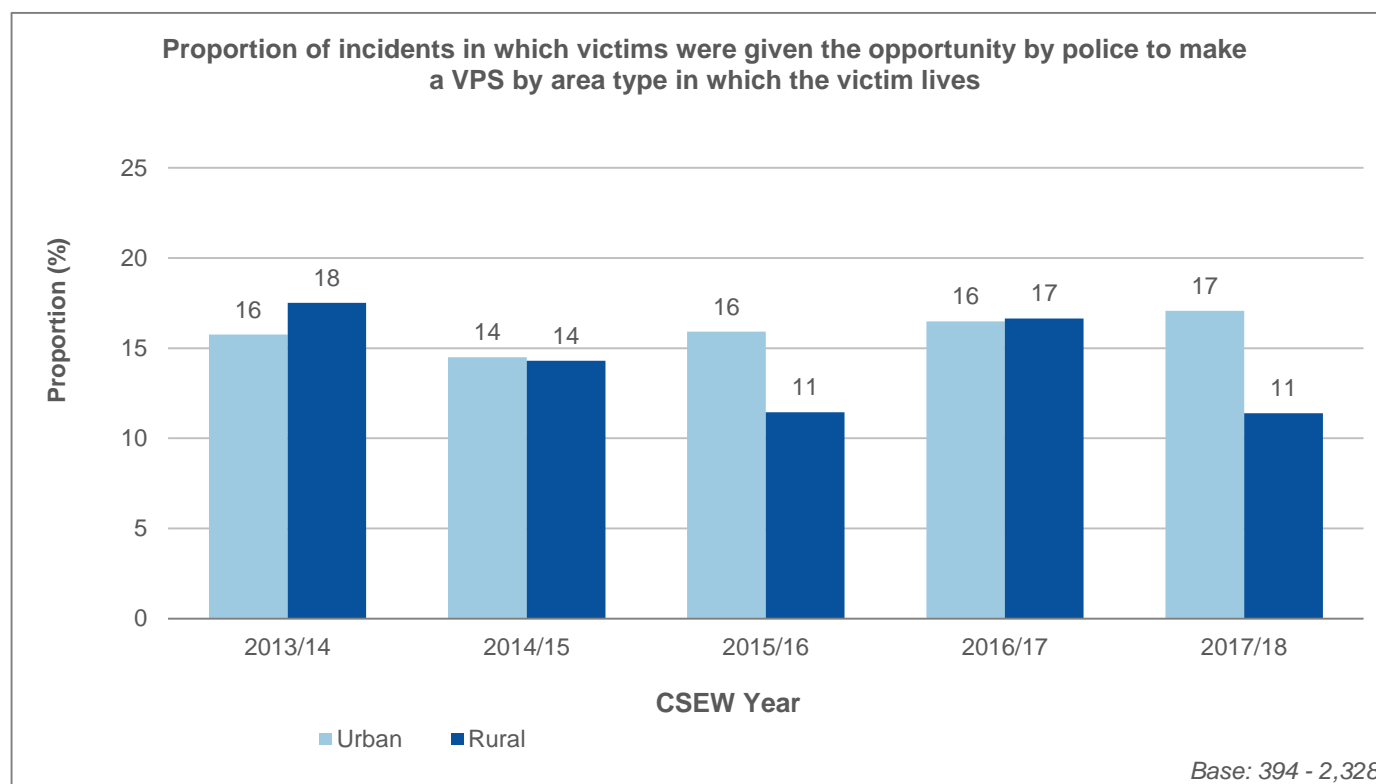
**Data not reported for other disability status groups due to small sample sizes*

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 the average across all incidents (66% and 67% made a VPS respectively compared to 57%). Incidents with victims who have no long-standing illness or disability were less likely to involve the victim making a VPS than the overall average (52% compared to 57% of all incidents).

Area type

In 2017/18, incidents occurring in urban areas were marginally more likely to involve the victim being offered a VPS in comparison to all incidents (17% compared to 16% of all incidents). This proportion was higher than in 2014/15 (14%) but remains consistent with other previous years.

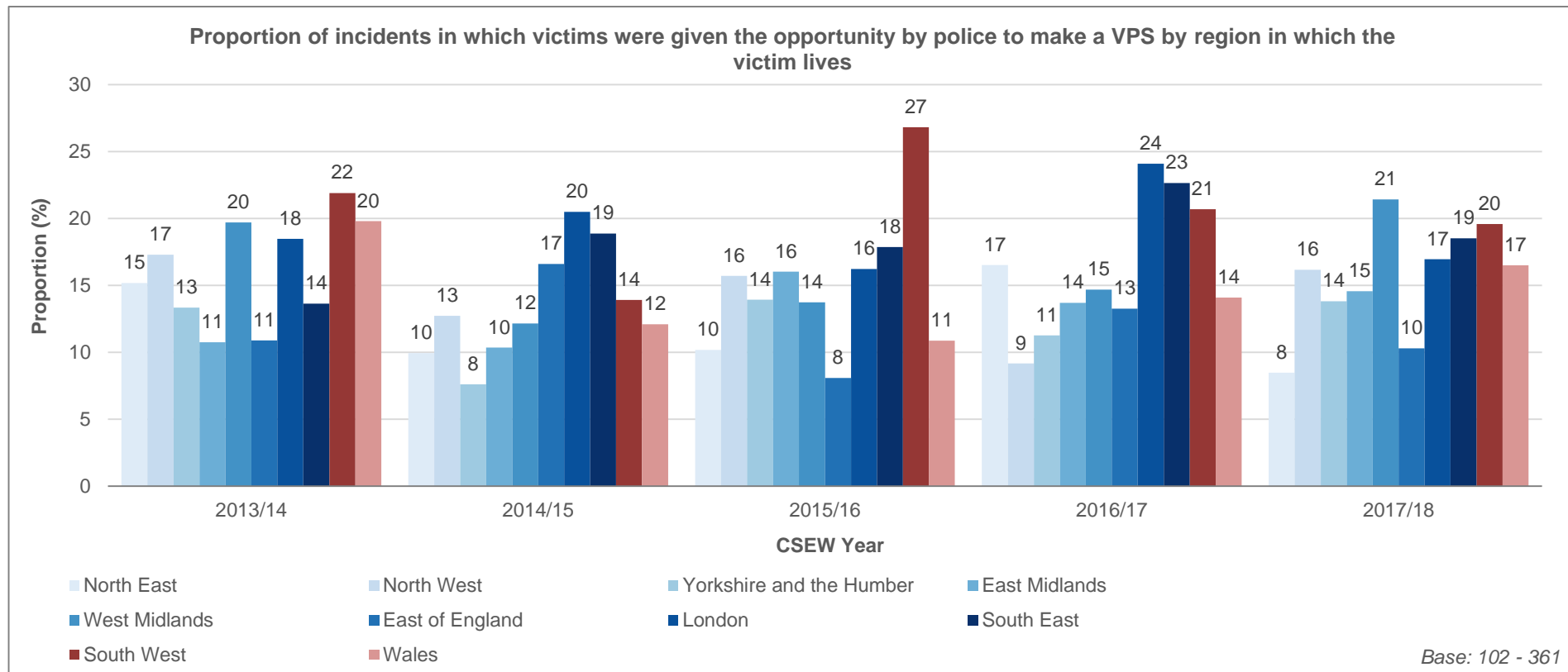
Conversely, incidents occurring in rural areas were proportionately less likely to see the victim offered the opportunity to make a VPS when compared to all incidents (11% compared to 16% of all incidents). This was lower than observed across the previous 12 months ending March 2017 (17%) and in 2013/14 (18%).



Region

In 2017/18, for incidents occurring in the North East of England and East of England, victims were less likely to be offered the opportunity to make a VPS when compared to incidents across all regions. In both areas approximately 1 in 10 (8%) incidents involved the victim being offered a VPS (8% and 10% respectively). This is in comparison to 1 in 6 (16%) of all incidents.

Incidents in the West Midlands were more likely to involve the victims being offered the opportunity to make a VPS when compared to all incidents (21%). This proportion has increased from 2015/16 (14%) and 2014/15 (12%).

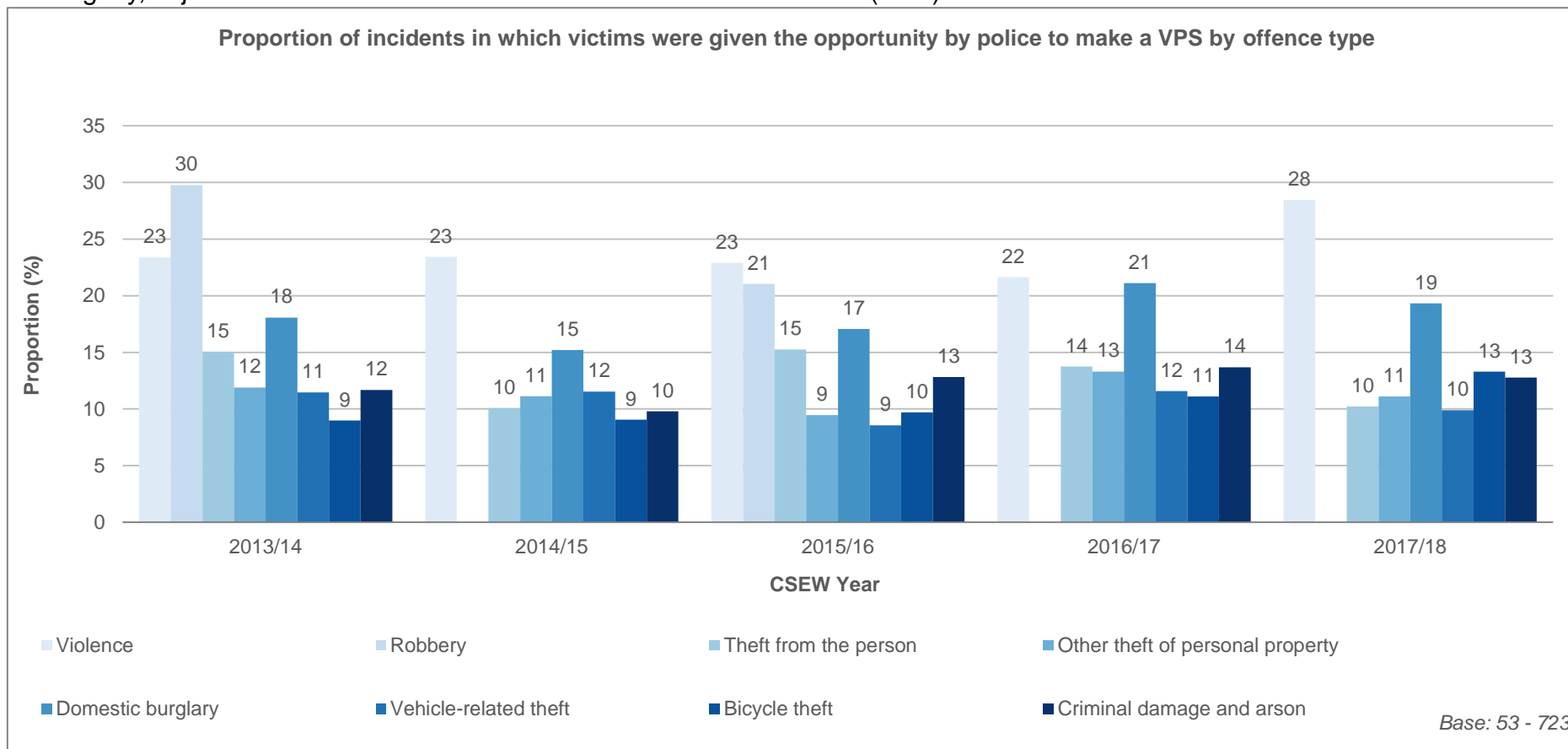


While proportions have remained consistent in the North East, Wales, South West, East Midlands and the South East since 2013/14, for other regions there have been some fluctuations. In the North West, for example, the proportion of incidents in which victims were offered a VPS was not significantly different to the average across all incidents, but had increased from the previous 12 months (16% compared to 9% in the year ending March 2017).

Offence

Incidents where victims were subject to vehicle-related theft (10%) and criminal damage and arson offences (13%) were less likely to involve the victim being offered a VPS than all incidents (16%). These figures were consistent with the previous years this question has been asked in the survey.

Violence and domestic burglary offences were more likely to see the victim offered a VPS compared to all incidents. In over a quarter of violence incidents (28%), victims were offered the opportunity to make a VPS. This proportion had increased from the previous 12 months (from 22% in 2016/17). For incidents involving victims of domestic burglary, in just under 1 in 5 incidents were the victims offered a VPS (19%).



*Data not reported for Robbery offences in 2017/18, 2016/17 and 2014/15 due to small sample sizes

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 households per year.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) announced last year that future funding of the CSEW is to be reduced from October 2017. To account for the reduction in funding the ONS 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 also 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.

The limitations of the question should also be recognised. The question asks about VPS offered by the police. In some cases, VPS are offered by victim support services funded by Police and Crime Commissioners, which respondents may not associate with the police. It is unclear whether this will have influenced the findings in any way.