HOME OFFICE:
Drug Prevalence using CSEW

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Introduction

In October 2018, the Home Secretary announced an Independent Review of Drugs, looking into the ways in which drugs are fuelling serious violence. Part of this review will include providing an up-to-date picture on drug use in England and Wales, and will include the use of data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), an annual survey with a section on drug use. My project involved analysis of CSEW data on drug use, looking at the trends in drug use over time and by demographic and geographic variables.

Objectives

The main objective of my project was to find trends in drug use, split by drug type and demographic variables. By doing this, my research would help the Home Office understand current trends in drug use in England and Wales. My personal objective was to develop my communication skills, learn how to write SPSS syntax and understand how the civil service operates.

Method

Data from the CSEW was in SPSS format, so I used SPSS syntax to extract frequencies and cross tabs. First, I looked at CSEW data for 11-15 year olds between 2008/09 and 2017/18. I produced statistics for how many children used marijuana, carried a knife and were in a gang. I presented these results in the form of bar charts and line graphs using MS Excel. Due to the small sample size, it became evident that the un-weighted base numbers for these statistics were too low for the statistics to be generalisable. Hence, I turned my attention to adult responses to the CSEW over the same period. I used the Ctables and OMS commands in SPSS, which produce more detailed tables representing the use of various drugs.

For a specific drug, adults had been asked whether they had taken it in the past year and whether they had taken it in the past month. I then linked those responses to the area in which they were recorded, as well as the age and gender of the respondent. Certain variables had to be recoded as binary response variables in order to produce accurate means. Some variables in the questionnaire had changed over the years, so I had to recode them to match other years. I looked at last month drug use to analyse whether there were seasonal changes in the use of drugs. Having run the syntax for each year, I collected the data in Excel. I created tables showing the change in variables over time and created corresponding graphs and bar charts showing the various results.

Results and Conclusions

Due to the CSEW being unpublished, I am unable to share specific findings of my analysis. I often could link my analysis to current topics of interest for the Home Office, such as the issue of county lines. Another topic of interest was the use of drugs by students in certain areas. My findings helped provide depth to researchers' understanding of these issues.

Key Skills Learnt

During this internship, I learnt how to write and run SPSS syntax to analyse large data files. I learnt how to create graphs and bar charts in Excel to effectively represent data trends.

A key skill that I learnt was how to carry out research in a reproducible way, so my research could be checked by others.

I learnt first-hand how a government department works, and gained confidence working in an office environment. I also had to present my findings to colleagues, gaining valuable communication skills.