

Welcome to the National Crime Victimization Survey Knowledge Corner. This short video will provide an overview of the Identity Theft Supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey, or ITS.

The history of the ITS can be traced back to the mid-2000s. From 2004 to 2008, household identity theft data were collected through the screener of the National Crime Victimization Survey, or NCVS. However, household-level data did not capture individual experiences of identity theft, since only one head-of-household member served as a proxy respondent for all other household members. In April 2007, the President's Identity Theft Task Force released a strategic plan entitled "Combating Identity Theft," which recommended that the Bureau of Justice Statistics, or, BJS collect person-level data on identity theft through the NCVS.

In 2008, BJS made an initial attempt to respond to the recommendation with the 2008 Identity Theft Supplement to the NCVS. BJS developed the 2008 ITS in collaboration with four federal agencies: the Federal Trade Commission, the National Institute of Justice, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and the Office for Victims of Crime. Through the 2008 ITS, BJS was successfully able to gather person-level data on the prevalence of identity theft and the cost of crime to victims.

In 2009, two major shortcomings were identified in the 2008 ITS. One was the two series of questions related to attempted and successful identity theft, which made the questionnaire complicated. The other was the two-year reference period where analysis showed that respondents had trouble remembering incidents that occurred outside of the first year. The ITS was redesigned and a number of changes were implemented including, using a one-year reference period and asking all victims the same questions and not forcing them to distinguish between attempted and completed identity theft. The redesigned ITS was then administered in 2012.

The supplement would be administered every two years from 2012 until 2019 when BJS decided to conduct additional methodological research on the ITS. One concern was telescoping, which is when respondents report incidents that occurred outside of the reference period. The other was that the incidents reported in the ITS were unbounded, which means that the incidents reported in the ITS were not checked to see if they had been reported in a previous administration of the ITS. In the Fall of 2019, BJS contracted with RTI International to conduct research on the ITS screener. This research caused the ITS to be taken off of its two-year rotation and was not administered in 2020.

The research resulted in several changes to the ITS questionnaire including the exclusion of attempted identity theft, using a dual reference period asking about lifetime and past year incidents of each type of identity theft, asking respondents for the month and year of the most recent occurrence of each type of past year identity theft experienced, and adding a separate screener question for the misuse of existing email and social media accounts. These changes were implemented into the ITS and was most recently administered in 2021.

The ITS has been administered six times since 2008. Eligible respondents are age 16 or older who complete a core NCVS interview. The ITS is administered from January to June or July to December of a given calendar year.

BJS defines identity theft as the theft of personal information which typically occurs beyond the victim's consent, knowledge, and control. This theft usually leads to the misuse of an existing account, opening of a new account, or other fraudulent purposes.

According to the most recent version of the ITS questionnaire, identity theft is defined as being one of six crime types: the misuse of an existing bank account, the misuse of an existing credit card account, the misuse of an existing email or social media account, the misuse of another type of existing account, the opening of a new account or the misuse of personal information for other fraudulent purposes, such as getting medical treatment.

The current ITS questionnaire is divided into several sections. First is the screener, which asks respondents about experiencing each of the six types of identity theft during their lifetime and during the past year. The screener also asks for the most recent date of the occurrence of each type of identity theft experienced in the past year.

The ITS also asks victims details of the most recent incident, such as how and when the identity theft was discovered and offender information. It also collects information on the financial and emotional impact of the crime.

The third section of the questionnaire deals with the long-term consequences of identity theft that happened more than one year before the interview. The questionnaire also asks all respondents about preventative behaviors taken to prevent identity theft and their experience with data breaches.

The webpage to access information about the ITS is shown on this screen. Here, the user can find information about the methodology of the ITS, download ITS questionnaires, and access BJS publications and products that use ITS data. Users can also access a link to the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD) where they can download the ITS datasets and codebooks.

Also available to users are two infographics related to the ITS. One has definitions of each of the six types of identity theft. The other contains findings from the most recent report using ITS data.

To view other Knowledge Corner videos, please go to YouTube to view the playlist. For more information about the NCVS, see the NCVS data collection page on the BJS website. Please email askbjs@usdoj.gov with any questions and your email will be forwarded to BJS statisticians with topical experience.

Thank you.