

**Neighbourhood Watch Membership:  
Trends, obstacles, members' and potential members' profiles**

**Executive Summary**

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## Executive Summary

Local Neighbourhood Watch (NW) schemes have operated in England and Wales on a voluntary basis since the 1980's. The Neighbourhood & Home Watch Network, is now a national organisation which aims to (among other goals) prevent crime, particularly household crime and in recent years cybercrime, and increase community safety and resilience, especially amongst vulnerable communities.

Previous research found that living in a NW area significantly reduces the number of crimes resident households may suffer and vulnerable population groups, such as lone parents and social renters in NW areas are more protected than others (Tseloni 2006; Pease and Tseloni 2014). Although NW areas have on average low levels of deprivation the uptake of NW in deprived areas is influenced by local crime rates (Brunton-Smith and Bullock 2018).

The current study aims to give a detailed picture of Neighbourhood Watch (NW) membership, appetite for it (NW demand) and whether these are related to crime experiences and perceptions. It explores trends and patterns of NW membership, "drop-off" and demand, including members' and potential members' crime experiences and perceptions, across different household socio-economic groups, area types and Police Force Areas (PFAs). In this light the study may indirectly address to what extent NW achieves the goals outlined earlier. The study relies on statistical analyses (time series graphs from 1992 to 2016/17, over time bivariate associations and hierarchical logit regression modelling) of the Crime Survey for England and Wales, an impeccable nationally representative data source of crime experiences and related topics. The main findings are given below.

National NW membership has dropped, especially between 2000 and 2006/07, after a period of considerable increase. In 2000, the peak year, just over a fourth of households - nearly 4.5 million - in England and Wales were in a NW scheme. However national NW membership has plateaued since 2009/10; in 2016/17 it was 9 percent or about 2.2 million households, still a sizeable community. The membership rate within NW areas has constantly been falling since the start of the study period: it declined from 76 percent of households living in areas operating a NW scheme in 1992 to 36 percent in 2016/17.

Households which are NW members have a number of distinct characteristics: they are households with Household Representative Persons (HRPs) of older age, affluent (annual household income of £30,000 or more), with at least one car, of intermediate or professional social class, residing either in social housing or their own detached house and living in the same area of the South or East of England or the Midlands for at least 5 years. The above profile of a typical NW member varies across regions whereas particular combinations of socio-economic characteristics in households affect their membership. With the exception of personal crime, NW members have no different crime victimisation or crime worries than non-members.

NW membership varies considerably across PFAs, a finding which overall may reflect the North – South divide of the country or ‘mental proximity’ to London. The differences in NW membership across PFAs are to a large extent (but not completely) explained by the characteristics of households in these PFAs. PFA differences in NW membership may reflect disparities in NW quality of service and/or differences in levels of deprivation. Indeed the most common reason given by non-member households in NW areas for not participating in the movement is that no one has asked them to join. Furthermore differences in NW membership net of household and area type effects across PFAs arguably reflect the strength of local police - NW links.

In relation to NW demand, an appetite for joining the movement comes from households of older age female HRPs of almost all ethnicities (except Chinese or Other), with one or two adults and children, affluent (annual household income £30,000 or more), with at least one car, from all social classes except never worked/unemployed, owner occupiers of terraced houses, which leave their house empty for less than 7 hours on a typical weekday and live in an urban and inner city area, especially in Wales. The above profile of a typical household with NW demand varies slightly across regions whereas a number of particular combinations of socio-economic characteristics contribute to greater or lower NW demand than otherwise expected. Crucially, households with NW demand are disproportionately victims of household crime, worry about burglary and/or believe crime has gone up. Therefore providing information about the scheme and how to join within the standard security assessments by Police Community Support Officers immediately after a burglary to both victims and their neighbours would arguably expand NW membership and its socio-economic diversity.

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