



From a System to a Service Criminal Justice, Victims & Witnesses

Smart-phone apps are revolutionising consumer behaviour. Their potential for reducing crime and the fear of crime is considerable, though so far not sufficiently recognised. But they can play a big part in making it easier for people to report crimes. They can also enable the police and courts to provide a better experience for victims and witnesses. By influencing attitudes, they can help reposition the Criminal Justice System as a Service that is for, and is supported as such by, the public.

This report looks at the early experiences of victims and witnesses who have used the new Self Evident app to report crime to the police and engage with the criminal justice process. It also identifies the crucial policy issues that will determine the future success of such initiatives.

Timeline and Context

1. Self Evident is a smart-phone app that can send crime reports and evidence to the police. It is the first of its kind in the world. It has four aims:
 - i) offering the public a convenient way to contact and help the police,
 - ii) giving victims and witnesses confidence to engage with the criminal justice process,
 - iii) saving time and money, and
 - iv) deterring crime.
2. In September 2013, after a pilot in London, the Self Evident app was made available across England & Wales and promoted through Google.
3. In October 2013 the Independent Police Complaints Commission criticised police conduct over the Plebgate affair; began investigating whether an officer had acted 'on behalf of' Jimmy Saville; and was contacted by hundreds of witnesses as it reviewed whether the police had misrepresented the evidence they had been given about the Hillsborough disaster.
4. In November 2013 the Policing Minister, Damian Green MP, cited the promise of crime reporting apps as one of the achievements of the first year of Police & Crime Commissioners.
5. In December 2013 Keir Starmer QC, lately DPP, was appointed by the Labour Party to head a Taskforce to turn the Criminal Justice System into a Service as "most victims and witnesses don't have the confidence to come forward, most have a pretty awful journey through the court process and nearly all say they'll never do it again."
6. In January 2014 the UK Statistics Authority removed its official kite mark from police crime records following evidence that this information had been improperly manipulated. This same month, the Self Evident app was rated in the local media as one to the top five apps to improve people's quality of life.
7. In February 2014 Witness Confident publishes this report. It reviews user experiences of the people who made the first 100 Self Evident crime reports. It also considers how such initiatives can help encourage victims and witnesses to come forward; improve confidence in their evidence; and rebuild public trust in, and support for, the police and the criminal justice process.

We thank (i) the individuals who have taken up and used the Self Evident app, (ii) the police officers who have worked with this charitable initiative, and (iii) the 26 police forces in England & Wales that handle Self Evident crime reports centrally. These are Bedfordshire, Cheshire, Cumbria, Dyfed-Powys, Essex, Gloucestershire, Gwent, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Merseyside, Metropolitan Police, Greater Manchester, Norfolk, Northumbria, North Wales, North Yorkshire, South Wales, South Yorkshire, Suffolk, Sussex, Thames Valley, Warwickshire and West Mercia.

Contents

Timeline and Context	1
Victims' and witnesses' views on the Self Evident app	3
1. Introduction & Summary	4
1.1 The Self Evident app	
1.2 Early days	
1.3 Survey findings	
1.4 A promising prospect	
1.5 A practical matter	
1.6 Competition, Innovation, Savings & Financing	
2. Recommendations	8
3. Methodology	9
4. Victim and Witness Experiences	10
5. Crime Scenarios	16
6. Funding, promotion & evaluation	17
Appendix - Survey questions	20

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Victims' and witnesses' views on the Self Evident app

These comments were made by app users during telephone interviews

I like the fact that you can record the location and time, give proof and report different types of incident.

It's useful to have the ability to film the scene of an incident, as then you can revisit it later.

The app works well, and I was very happy with the police's response.

It's reassuring to be able to track when the police have accessed my report.

It's good you can gather evidence and build up a case history.

I like the way it takes you through the reporting process. It's very easy to record a video statement as you're guided through it.

If you go to court, it's good to have a record of what you said.

The app made me feel secure for the first time in a while.

It's CCTV in everyone's pocket, whenever you need it.

101 would charge me for a call. I wanted to use the app because it's free.

It's more private than phoning so it'll be useful in cases like domestic violence.

I think it's great and can't wait to see more police using it.

1 Introduction & Summary

1.1 *The Self Evident app*

The Self Evident app allows victims and witnesses to report non-emergency crime from their smart-phone to the relevant police team. Users can attach photographic or video evidence to their report, along with a video or audio statement about the incident and what they witnessed. A unique feature enables the app to independently corroborate the reliability of this evidence.

Self Evident can also help in situations where victims are unsure about reporting an incident immediately to the police – say, in a case of sex abuse or domestic violence. It enables them to secure the evidence in their private account, share it with an adviser and pass it to the police as and when they are ready to report it.

By utilising the benefits of smart-phone technology, the Self Evident app aims to:

1. offer the public a convenient way to contact and help the police,
2. give victims and witnesses confidence to engage with the criminal justice process,
3. save time and money, and
4. deter crime.

More information about the app's crime functions – along with video guides - can be found at www.witnessconfident.org. Witness Confident is a charity and legal advice centre and it promotes and supports the app as a means to engage the public and reduce crime. Just Evidence, its sister social enterprise, provides the app. Any profit that arises from the app's use in the reporting of crime will go to support various charitable anti-crime works in the field.

1.2 *Early days*

Self Evident was trialled in London from 11 June 2013 and made available more widely in England & Wales from 11 September.

While the Met Police were consulted on the app in and from 2012, awareness of it was low in other parts of the country. Although neither the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) nor the Home Office endorses the app, following their recommendation most police forces now handle Self Evident reports in their central HQ and we thank them for their co-operation.

To help inform the way the app is used, ACPO suggested we undertake this small survey. It considers the experiences and views of the users who made the first one hundred Self Evident crime reports.

These reports – a third with validated evidence – covered a range of incidents from anti-social behaviour, assault, burglary, dangerous driving, drug offence, fraud, harassment, hate crime, police misconduct, stalking, street robbery, theft, and breach of court order.

By January 2014 the app had 4,800 registered users. As the app has not hitherto been promoted by the police, users found out about Self Evident on Google, from the media coverage in September, or by word of mouth recommendation.

1.3 *Survey findings*

Support

This survey of victims and witnesses suggests there is considerable support for crime reporting apps:

- 92% recommend the Self Evident app
- 95% value the fact they can track when the police access their report
- 97% say the police should encourage people to report crime by smart-phone
- 100% value the fact they retain a copy of their report and evidence

Police Response

Satisfaction as to the promptness, helpfulness and effectiveness of the police response showed that 67% of users were very or fairly satisfied where forces handled Self Evident crime reports centrally. As more forces do this – in line with the recommendations of the Home Office and ACPO – and as the occasional teething problems some forces may have accessing early app reports are resolved, stronger satisfaction rates can be expected. Three police forces were praised consistently highly: Greater Manchester, Kent and Lancashire. The Metropolitan Police – which had the most reports - received equally positive feedback from many users, though not from all.

Funding

Over two thirds of users said that the cost of Self Evident crime reports should be met out of public or police funds. The remainder were divided as to whether the cost should be met by the individual user or by charitable foundations.

Improvements

Users suggested a number of improvements to the app. They suggested (i) some of the information about the app's features could be better explained, (ii) users should be able to attach video and photo evidence taken from outside the app, and (iii) the Android version of the app should include the video functions that exist on the iPhone version. They also suggested that the police should (as some forces now do) email users saying how their report will be handled and by whom.

1.4 *A promising prospect*

Engagement

Although this is a small survey, the findings show that crime reporting apps are an effective way to encourage victims and witnesses to engage with the police and the courts. As Government uses its legislative, policy and funding levers to transform the Criminal Justice System from the producer side, smart-phone apps offer a promising, low-cost way to mobilise consumers toward this same goal.

Confidence

The early indications are that apps like Self Evident can play a valuable role in giving people confidence in the criminal justice process. By helping them record an early reliable account of what happened, by enabling photographic and video evidence to be attached, and by allowing users to keep a copy of their report and evidence, they give victims and witnesses a sense of autonomy and of ownership over their evidence that people expect in a modern consumer society. As these features improve the quality of the evidence available to the police and the courts, they will ease the path of victims and witnesses through the process.

Turning to public confidence in the police, crime reporting apps can help as they enable victims and witnesses to track police access of their report and to provide confidential feedback. Where an app allows users to retain a copy of their report and evidence with their initial classification of the crime type, this reduces any temptation to improperly downgrade or 'no crime' an incident and so will help rekindle trust in police crime records.

Efficiencies

In terms of time and money, it is too early to say with confidence but users commented that how the app saved them and the police time waiting on the phone, going to the station, making a witness statement or gathering evidence. We outline some of the likely financial savings in section 1.6.

Deterrence

There is no evidence from this survey that the app's use has helped deter crime. The fact that many people now use smart-phones to record incidents that they witness – be they criminal or newsworthy – will already have a deterrent effect. (Where it does not deter, the value to the police and the courts of evidence from smart phones is clear from the case into the murder of Lee Rigby. Crime reporting apps additionally provide a secure and simple way for the public to provide video and photo images to the police about high profile and more routine crimes.) When crime reporting apps are generally promoted by the police, they should enhance this deterrent effect because, since there is no obvious way a criminal can tell whether the app is on any smart-phone that is being used by an onlooker, they will deter opportunists.

1.5 A practical matter

Local or national apps?

The 43 police forces in England & Wales are each responsible for policing in their own area and for their local IT. While there are advantages to this arrangement, it creates a practical dilemma as to whether different apps should be developed for different force areas.

First, there is a risk that a force-specific app may be designed more to fit its IT systems than to meet the interests of the public it serves. Secondly, many people live and work in different policing areas or travel around the country for business or pleasure. It is unlikely they will want to have more than one crime reporting app on their phone. Rather – as Government recognised with the 101 phone number – the public will be better served if crime reporting apps offer a nationwide service.

For these reasons - and as most forces with their different IT platforms can handle reports from a national app effectively and efficiently as this report shows - it seems unlikely that many police chiefs and Commissioners will want to spend public money on the development and operation of a force specific app.

Nevertheless, a deficiency in the way Self Evident now operates is that it does not allow a force a sense of ownership or control. For this reason, we recommend that Just Evidence offer badged versions of the Self Evident app to individual police forces. This will this enable a force to promote its own version and add distinct messages tailored to the public it serves, while providing a reporting service that will function equally well where a user is outside the area of that force.

1.6 *Competition, Innovation, Savings & Financing*

Competition and Innovation

While the survey results suggest that Self Evident offers a welcome new service, competitive pressures – whether from other apps or other crime reporting methods (online or phone) – can only improve the extent to which this and other initiatives can help the police and the courts provide a better service to victims, witnesses and the public.

Crucially, these benefits can only be secured if there is a level playing field where Government takes care that the arrangements it administers and oversees in this area do not distort competition. While the funding arrangements it provides for such initiatives will be the most telling example, care should also be taken that any common operating standards do not unnecessarily stifle innovation.

Savings and Financing

Smart-phone apps and police online reporting services offer an efficient way for the police to handle and prioritise non-emergency crime reports. Because the information is digital – in line with Government's Action Plan for the Criminal Justice System - it can be copied and pasted from app crime reports into the force's own systems, so reducing the need for paperwork and for double transcribing what victims or witnesses say. Where photos or video footage are supplied, this will generate savings in collecting and producing evidence or in sifting through CCTV. While it is unrealistic to think that footage captured by the public on an app will normally be as pertinent and professional as that taken by an officer's body-worn camera, this is more than offset by the fact that smart-phones are already in wide use and will make no call on public funds for costly equipment to be purchased and maintained.

As to the financing of these initiatives, the survey found that over two-thirds of users thought the costs of app crime reports should be met by public or police funds (with the remainder divided as to whether charitable foundations or individuals should pay). In the light of the savings that crime reporting apps will bring public funds, this approach makes good financial sense. Attractions of a funding scheme that is based on crime reports are that (a) it lends itself to a payment by results approach as the savings secured can be quantified, and (b) it encourages new entrants and innovation, while avoiding any risk of distorting competition.

An alternative method of funding – also where more than one provider is involved - will be to adopt the approach Government has taken to the 101 phone service. Here the costs have been shared between central funds, police budgets and individual users. The Home Office spent over £900,000 pa for the first two years on the external costs of the 101 national number and police budgets now meet these annual charges¹, while victims and witnesses pay a per call cost.

As Government is keen to encourage public, private and voluntary sector initiatives in this area, ministers need to be clear about how they will be funded, and whether they expect victims and witnesses or charitable foundations to contribute to, or to cover all, the costs.

¹ Hansard, HC Deb, 17 July 2012, c649W

2 Recommendations

Government

1. Ministers need to make clear how crime reporting apps will be funded, particularly whether victims, witnesses or charitable foundations will be expected to contribute to, or to cover all, the costs.
2. To avoid damaging the potential of crime reporting apps and other third party initiatives to engage victims and witnesses, Government should ensure that the arrangements it administers and oversees do not distort competition or stifle innovation.

Police forces

1. Police Chiefs and Commissioners should promote the Self Evident app on their websites as a way for the public to report non-emergency crime.
2. Those forces that do not handle Self Evident crime reports centrally should now arrange to do so, as recommended by the Home Office and ACPO.
3. On accessing a Self Evident crime report, the police should email the victim or witness to say how the case is being handled and who will be dealing with it.

Just Evidence

1. Just Evidence should offer police chiefs and Commissioners a distinct badged version of the Self Evident app for their force and the public they serve.
2. It should review the communications it sends out so users are more aware of the tracking and validation features in crime reports.
3. It should explore the practicality of adding video features to the Android app, and consider – with the police, legal interests and Witness Confident – the implications of allowing users to attach unvalidated photographic and video evidence that has been recorded outside the app.

3 Methodology

This survey was helpfully suggested by the Association of Chief Police Officers on 8 November 2013 at a meeting at the Home Office.

The survey was carried out in December 2013 and January 2014. Its sample is made up of the Self Evident app users who sent the first one hundred Self Evident crime reports in England and Wales. As some users sent multiple reports, the total number of users we attempted to contact was 92.

The users were surveyed by phone. The questionnaire contained a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions (reproduced in the Appendix). If a user could not be contacted, two further attempts were made to ring on different days. If still unsuccessful, the user was sent an email asking for a convenient time to call.

Of 92 users, 47 could be contacted. Of these, 9 declined to participate in the survey giving a response rate of 81%.

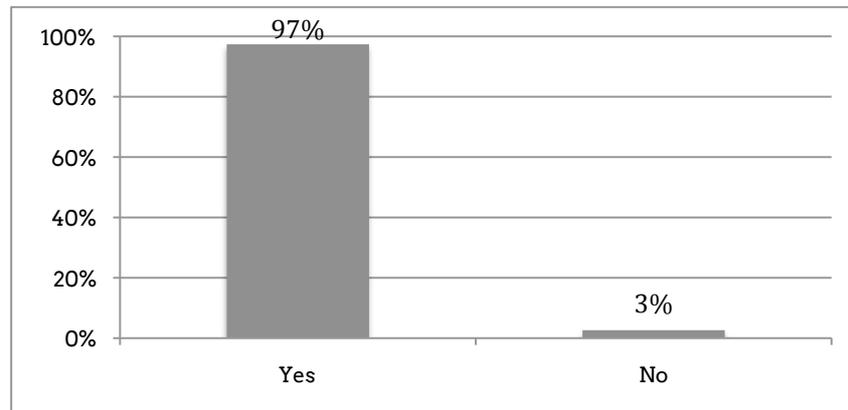
As this is necessarily a small survey, the findings need to be treated with caution.

4 User experiences

4.1 The App & Service

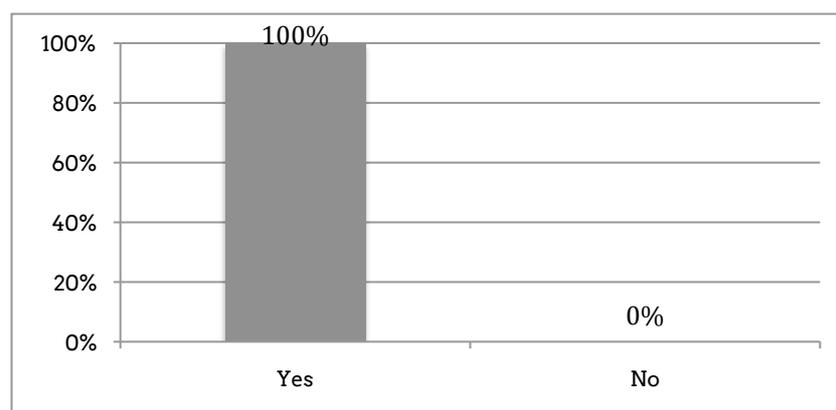
This section deals with the aspects of user experience that relate to the use of the app and service themselves. As both the quantitative and qualitative results show, the response was overwhelmingly positive, particularly with regard to certain features of the service.

4.1.1 *Did you find it easy to download and register the app?*

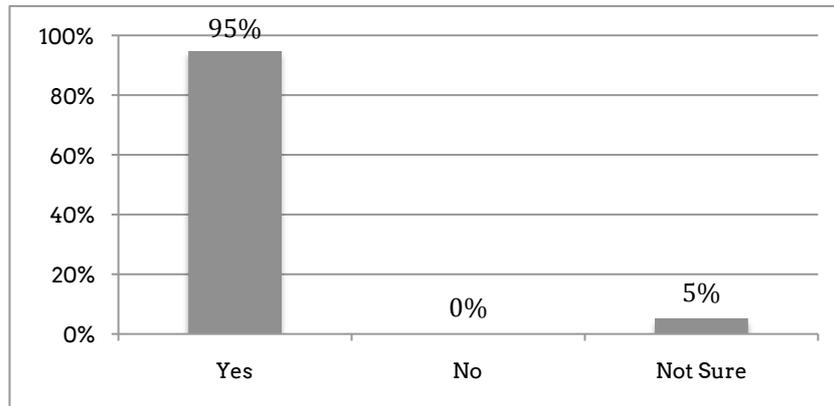


The one user who had trouble said that they were unable to register the app the first time they tried, but that a member of the Just Evidence team resolved the issue.

4.1.2 *People retain a copy of their report and any evidence in their secure account. Is this a valuable feature?*



4.1.3 Users can track when the police have accessed their report. Is this valuable?



4.1.4 What attracted you to use the app to report crime on this occasion?

In response to this open-ended question, users cited a wide variety of reasons why they had used the app on this occasion. Their replies fell into four groups – convenience, ease of use, ability to provide evidence and a preference for online reporting. Below is a fair selection from their answers:

“It’s quick”

“More convenient”

“It’s free, unlike 101”

“To collect evidence”

“It’s really easy to use”

“More private than phoning”

“There’s a lot of crime in my area”

“Saves time on witness statements”

“My police station is closed on Sundays”

“Phoned 101, but I was kept on hold for 25 minutes”

4.1.4 Users' Comments

Below are some of the comments users made during the telephone survey about why they value the app.

The fact that the police had seen my report meant they were pre-prepared for their visit, and already knew some of the background.

Makes the police more accountable.

The app is relatively easy to use and not too complicated.

It's perfect that you keep a copy of your report as you can go back to it later.

Tracking police access is very valuable.

Saves police the legwork.

The app can be used to record something as it's happening and it logs the location.

It's easier to report using the app. You can do it straight away, and send important information.

It saves time on witness statements.

An ideal app - should be on every phone like Twitter and Facebook.

You get more reliable evidence.

The app does everything you can possibly want.

4.1.5 Suggestions for Improvement

Asked whether they had ideas on how to improve the app or service, users highlighted the following points:

- The app should be available on a greater range of mobile devices (including Windows and more types of Android phones).
- The app should allow you to attach photo, audio and video evidence to a report even if the evidence was captured not on the app but on the smart-phone's own camera. (If this is to be done, it will not be possible to validate the authenticity of evidence taken outside of the app).
- The Android version of the app should have video capabilities.
- Clearer information could be provided about certain aspects of the service, such as the ability to track when their report has been accessed, the evidence validation service, and what to expect after sending a report.

4.2 The Police Response

Self Evident reports facilitate a timely police response by providing the user's contact email address and, if the user chooses, a validated mobile number.² This survey, however, brought to light several teething problems with the police response to Self Evident crime reports.

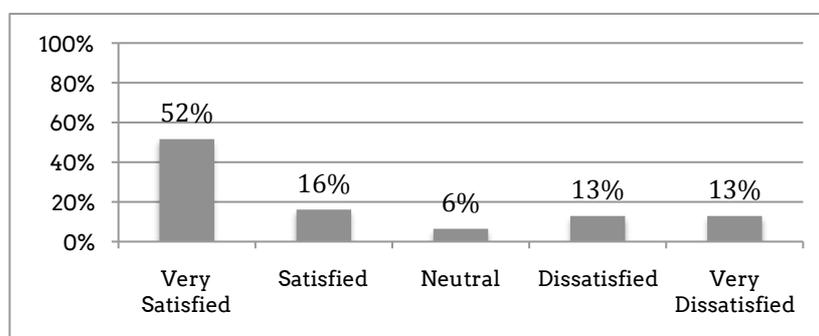
A third of respondents (34%) said they were not given a Crime Reference Number. Whilst this is obviously a concern, it is possible that there were valid reasons under the Home Office rules for not giving a CRN.

It is more of a concern that 7 users (18%) stated that the police did not respond to their report. It should be noted, though, that in three of the four force areas where this was reported, the force did respond to other users' reports.

The following forces, meanwhile, received very satisfied responses from one or more users: Greater Manchester, Gwent, Kent, Lancashire, Metropolitan Police, Surrey, and Thames Valley.

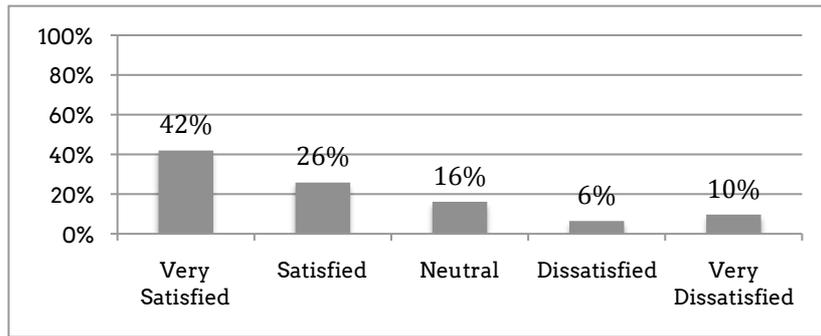
Users who said they received no police response have been excluded from the sample analysed in the rest of this section.

4.2.1 User satisfaction with the time the police took to respond

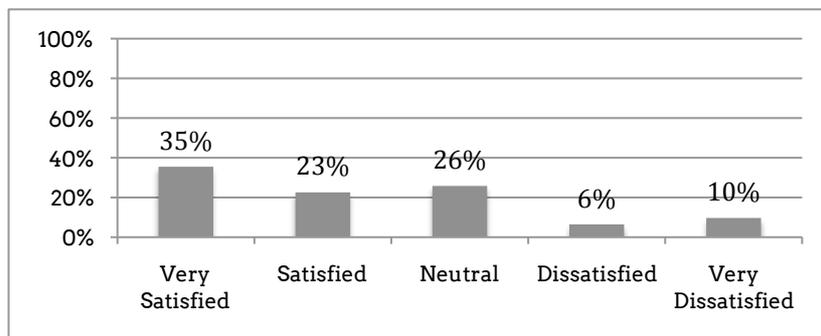


² Following a recommendation by ACPO, the user's phone number is now being included in crime reports by default.

4.2.2 *User satisfaction with the helpfulness of the police response*



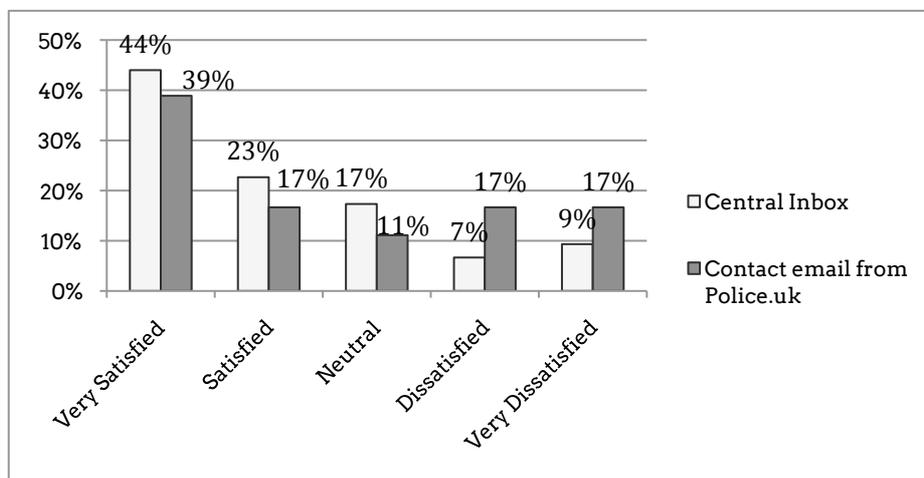
4.2.3 *User satisfaction with the effectiveness of the police response*



4.2.4 *The Use of Central Email Inboxes*

While the app is presently promoted in areas where a force handles these reports centrally, the app also works in other areas. In these cases, Self Evident crime reports are sent to the local Neighbourhood Police Team via the Home Office facility on www.police.uk.

As the chart below shows, users whose reports went to a central inbox gave more positive satisfaction ratings. The chart below amalgamates the above three satisfaction ratings and shows how those that went to a central inbox generated greater user satisfaction than those that did not.



4.2.5 *Issues to monitor and/or address*

Whilst the positive experiences of the majority demonstrate how the app can improve trust and confidence, several users raised issues with the police response which may reveal a lack of readiness to respond to Self Evident crime reports. Users highlighted the following issues:

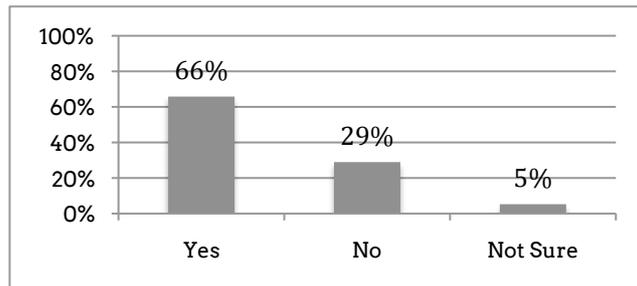
- expecting confirmation that their report was being handled and by whom.
- having to chase the police separately about the incident.
- receiving no follow-up after the initial police response.
- delays before the report reached the right department.
- being told that they should not use the app.
- that the app didn't work automatically in their case. (This is where the force had provided no email address to the Home Office for the relevant neighbourhood policing team).

5 Crime Scenarios

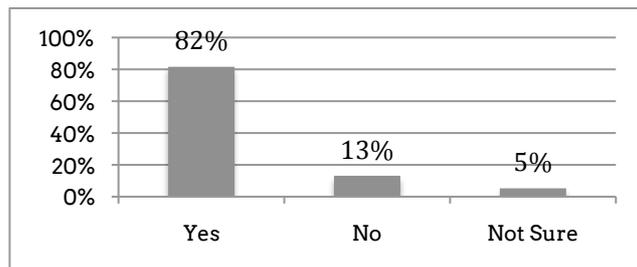
Users were asked whether they thought the app could be useful in a variety of non-emergency crime scenarios. As the data shows, a large majority thought the app would be useful for a wide variety of crimes. The advantage of the app most commonly cited in every case was the ability to gather evidence at the scene of the crime. Users also emphasised the ease of use and convenience of the app, as well as the facility to record and send information.

Some users, in each case, did not think the app would be useful or were hesitant to say it would. Most commonly, this was because they judged that the incident might require a quicker response, or that they would prefer to phone.

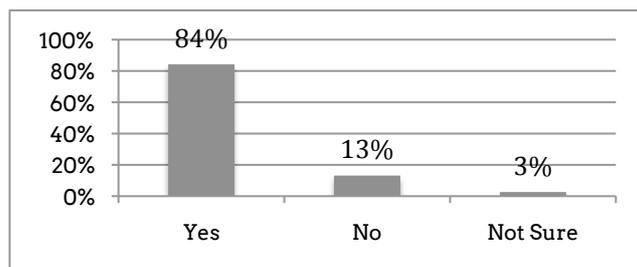
Someone returns to find their home has been broken into and a laptop stolen. Do you think the app could be useful here?



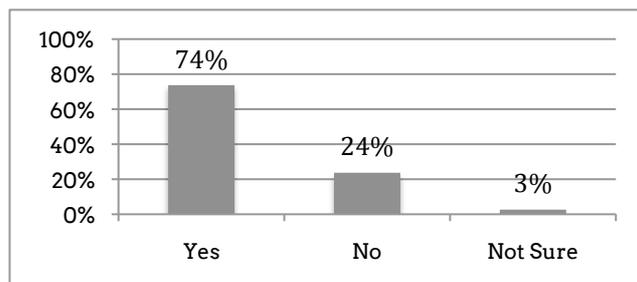
Someone believes a stranger is stalking them. Do you think the app could be useful here?



Someone witnesses a street crime. Do you think the app could be useful here?

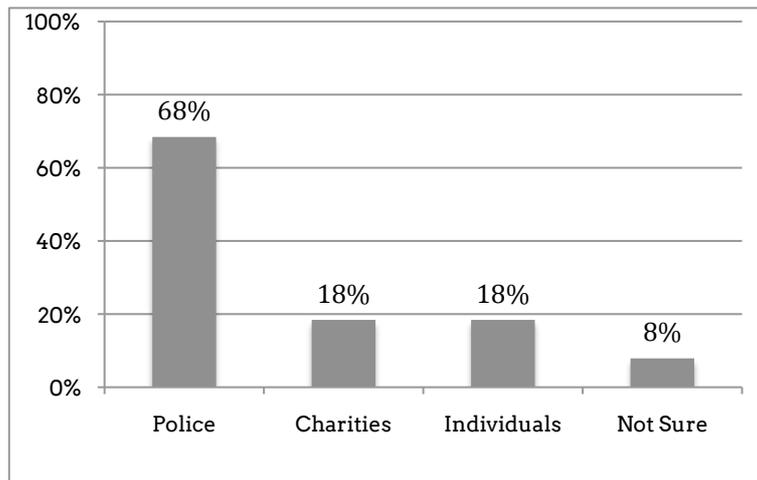


Someone is assaulted by their partner and is unsure whether to report it to the police. Do you think the app could be useful here?



6 Funding, promotion & evaluation

6.1 Users were asked whether, going forward, the cost of this app's crime reporting service should be paid for (a) by charitable foundations, (b) by individual users, or (c) from police / public funds. Some users chose more than one option, in which case both answers were counted.



I'm shocked that the app hasn't been paid for by public funds.

It's a 'no-brainer' – the police should support it.

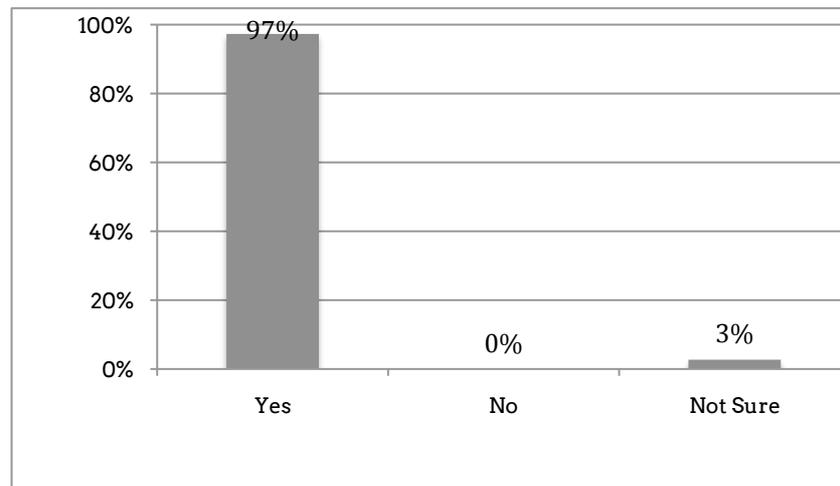
It's good that the app's free.

The police should pay. As they know who the user is the chances of misuse are much lower.

The police should also be trained in using the app so they are up to speed.

Charging users will reduce take-up.

6.2 As to whether the police should encourage people to use smart-phones to report crime and supply evidence, the view of users was clear:



I see a lot of frustration with the police, particularly in deprived areas. I think the app can make a difference

As so many calls go unanswered, the police should obviously encourage people to report by smart-phone.

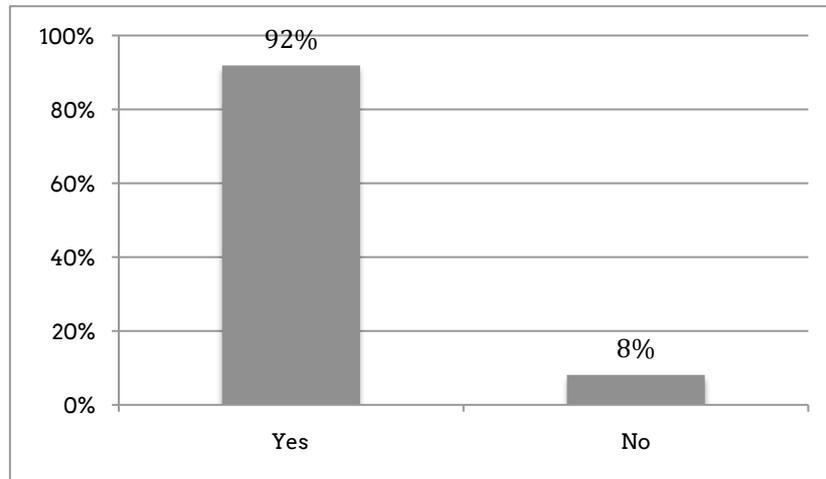
The police should spend more money promoting the app.

The app should be publicised more in schools and rough areas.

It should be promoted in the media so it's easier to hear about it.

The police should definitely encourage people to use smart-phones as it's easy to do and everyone has a smart-phone.

6.3 Finally users were asked whether they recommend the Self Evident app to report crime.



It's a wonderful idea.

I've already recommended it to loads of people.

I would definitely recommend the app. It's a really good idea to use smart-phones in this way.

It's brilliant.

It's such a good service.

The app should be on every phone by default.

Appendix: Survey Questions

SCRIPT	
Hello, can I speak to [user name]. My name is [caller name]. I'm calling about the Self Evident app as I understand you are one of the first 100 people to use it to report crime. I'd be grateful if you could spare five minutes to give some feedback, to help us improve the service.	
Is this a convenient time to talk?	
If it's not, when can I call back?	
Thank you. I'd like to clarify that any information you give will be confidential, and that it won't in any way be linked to you in any findings we publish.	
Did you find it easy to download and register the app?	Y/N
If not, what was the issue?	(Open)
What attracted you to use the app to report crime on this occasion?	(Open)
CRIME SCENARIOS	
The app was developed to give citizens a secure and convenient channel to engage with the police. As I imagine you know it has three features – people can capture validated evidence; record an early and reliable account of what happened; and send a report to the police. Could you tell me whether you think the app or any of these features would be useful in the following cases? <i>All Y/N/DK (If so/not, why?)</i>	
Someone returns to find their home has been broken into and a laptop stolen. Do you think the app could be useful here?	
Someone believes a stranger is stalking them. Do you think the app could be useful here?	
Someone witnesses a street crime. Do you think the app could be useful here?	
Someone is assaulted by their partner and is unsure whether to report it to the police. Do you think the app could be useful here?	
OTHER FEATURES	
I'd like to ask you about the value of a couple of other features of the app for crime reporting.	
People retain a copy of their report and any evidence in their secure account (and can also use this for insurance claims). Is this a valuable feature?	Y/N/DK
Users can track when the police have accessed their report. Is this valuable?	Y/N/DK
The charity that developed the app has made it free for people to report crime. Going forward, do you think the cost of this service should be paid for by (a) charitable foundations (b) individual users or (c) public funds/ the police using money from taxpayers?	CF/IU/PF/NS

POLICE RESPONSE	
Were you given a crime reference number?	<i>Y/N/DK</i>
Regarding the police's response to your report, were you satisfied with <i>All Very Satisfied/Satisfied/Neutral/Dissatisfied/Very Dissatisfied</i>	
Their response time?	
How helpful they were?	
How effective their response was?	
FINALLY	
Should the police encourage people to use smart-phones to report crime and supply evidence?	<i>Y/N/DK</i>
Would you recommend the app?	<i>Y/N/DK</i>
Do you have any suggestions on how we could improve the app or service?	
Thank you very much for your time, and if you have any queries about your Self Evident app, please don't hesitate to get in touch.	

From a System to a Service

Criminal Justice, Victims & Witnesses

This report looks at the potential of crime reporting apps to reconnect the public with the police and to improve the journey of victims and witnesses through the criminal justice process. It reviews the experiences of victims and witnesses who have used the new Self Evident app to report crime and engage with the police and also identifies the crucial policy issues that will determine the future success of such initiatives.

Witness Confident is an independent charity and legal advice centre that works to refresh the Criminal Justice System so it better serves the public. Our goal is to reduce the levels of crime in and fear across society. Our approach is that

- victims will not report crime if they lack confidence in the justice system,
- witnesses will not come forward unless the police make them feel welcome, and
- criminals will not be deterred if they are treated with more respect in court than the people who suffer or witness the crime.

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