

Article

The impact of crime on victims and society: March 2022

This article summarises the crime harm framework that has been used to categorise existing related data in the new crime harm interactive database. It also includes information on how to use the recently updated Crime Severity Score data tool.

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1 . Overview

- The new crime harm framework offers comprehensive and detailed categorisation of the available crime harm related data.
- The Crime Severity Score (CSS) data tool is designed to provide single value crime severity scores based on police recorded crime and sentencing data for various geographical areas and a measure of changes over time.
- The crime harm interactive database collates a wider range of published statistics relating to the impact of crime on individuals and society produced by public bodies in England and Wales.

2 . Crime harm

Crime harm refers to the negative impacts of crime on individuals and society. While crime is often seen as a harm in its own right, the negative impacts related to any one incident will differ by the type of crime experienced as well as the perspective of the victim. These harms include a wide range of outcomes for both individuals, such as financial loss and physical harm, and for communities and wider society, such as fear of crime and increased use of health and victim services.

The Centre for Crime and Justice at the Office for National Statistics publishes various data related to crime harm, as well as the [Crime Severity Score \(CSS\) data tool](#). The CSS data tool was developed to complement police recorded crime count data by providing a single value for crime severity to measure change over time and between geographical areas. As with other measures based on police recorded crime, the CSS is affected by variations in recording practices over time and between areas. For more information on how the CSS data tool can be used see the [Crime Severity Score data tool section](#).

The CSS data tool and other indexes based on police recorded crime, such as the [Cambridge Harm Index \(CHI\)](#), reflect the relative harm of an offence to society and the likely demands on the police. However, they do not provide detailed information on the wide-ranging impacts crime can have on individuals and society. Therefore, in addition to the CSS data tool, we have developed a crime harm interactive database to collate and organise data on this topic.

There are a variety of crime harm models that have already been developed to better measure the impact of crime on society. Two of the main crime harm models were conceptualised by Hillyard and Tombs (2007) in [From 'Crime' to Social Harm](#) and Greenfield and Paoli (2013) in [A framework to assess the harms of crimes](#).

Both models propose identifying the possible harms associated with criminal activity and the bearer of those harms. While Hillyard and Tombs discussed organising impacts of crime at different levels (for example, individual, community and societal level) using a “social harm” approach, Greenfield and Paoli also discussed evaluating and standardising the severity of each harm.

To achieve the most comprehensive and detailed categorisation of the available data, we have created a framework based on concepts outlined in these two models. This includes organising data by “who” is impacted by crime (harm level) and “what type” of harm is experienced (domain), within the crime harm interactive database.

Harm level

One of the main ways we can organise crime harm information is by identifying “who” is experiencing the impact of crime. This is most commonly split into harms experienced by individuals, communities, institutions and wider society. Therefore, the proposed framework contains four crime harm levels:

- individual level – harms directly impacting individual members of society, for example, emotional damage to a person or a broken bone or other physical injury
- community level – harms impacting communities at a local level, such as antisocial behaviour, that can affect the neighbourhood environment and perceptions of safety
- institutional level – harms that directly affect businesses, the government and third sector organisations, such as financial losses from fraud and theft offences
- societal level – harms that have wide-ranging impacts that affect society as a whole, such as expenditure of public money to fund victim services

Type of harm

We have also organised the various impacts of crime into different crime harm domains. These are defined as follows for the purposes of this article:

- physical – any physical damage including death, injury, or violence
- emotional or psychological – any adverse impacts on psychological and emotional well-being
- financial or economic – any material or financial losses
- community safety – any restrictions in autonomy, freedom of movement, access to information, or growth and development because of fear or other detrimental effects of crime
- privacy – any violation of privacy, including access to personal or confidential information or unauthorised entry to property

See the [crime harm interactive database](#) section for further information on the types of data that are collated into this framework.

3 . Crime Severity Score data tool

Existing official statistics on crime data from both the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and police recorded crime are presented as counts of the number of offences or as a rate of offences recorded per head of population, broken into broad offence categories. However, these counts do not take into account the varying severity of crimes within broad offence categories, or the demands these will place on the police.

In response to past reviews of crime statistics and recommendations to create a weighted crime measure, the Office for National Statistics developed the [Crime Severity Score \(CSS\)](#), a weighted measure of crimes recorded by the police, in 2016. The CSS data tool complements police recorded crime count data by providing a single value for crime severity.

By “severity”, we intended to reflect the relative harm of an offence to society and the likely demands on the police, given that the police resource requirements are likely to be greater for offences that are more serious. Severity of offences was calculated using Ministry of Justice sentencing data to produce weights for the CSS data tool. These weights were updated in 2021 with sentencing data to year ending March 2019 to reflect any changes in sentencing guidelines.

Crime Severity Score over time

The data tool enables analysis of trends over time. Similar trends are seen for both the police recorded crime rate and the Crime Severity Score (Figure 1). The increases in the Crime Severity Score were more pronounced than the police recorded crime rate between year ending March 2014 and year ending March 2019 because of rises in more serious violent and sexual offences, which have a larger weight.

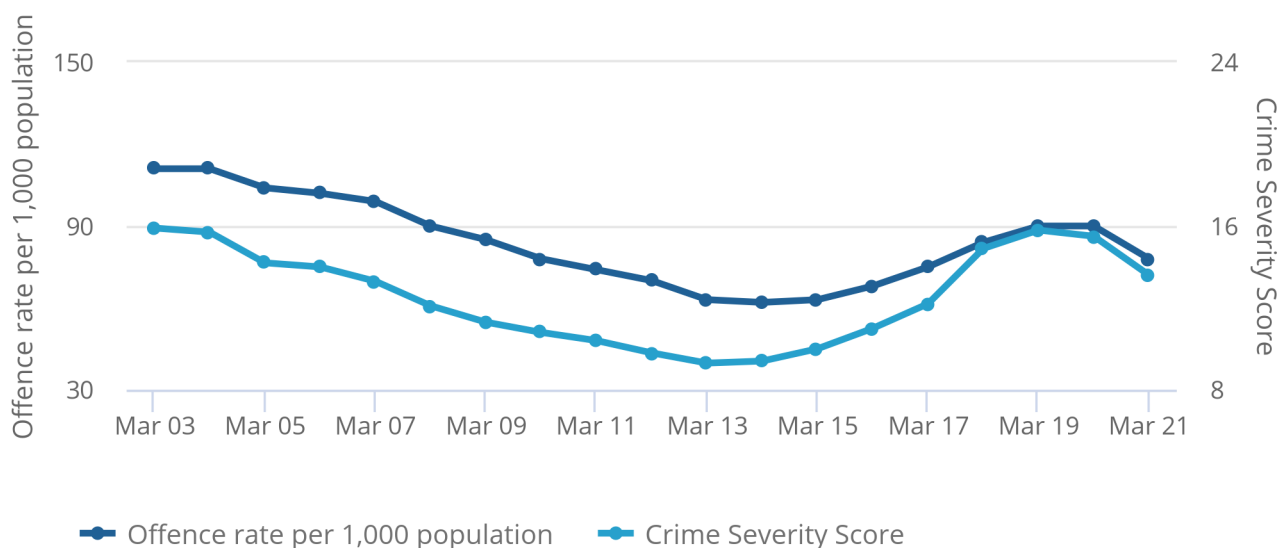
Various [improvements to recording processes and practices](#) by the police made substantial contributions to rises in these offences during this period. Decreases from year ending March 2020 to year ending March 2021 reflect the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Figure 1: Trends in police recorded crime offence rate and Crime Severity Score for England and Wales

Year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2021

Figure 1: Trends in police recorded crime offence rate and Crime Severity Score for England and Wales

Year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2021



Source: Home Office - Police recorded crime and Office for National Statistics - Crime Severity Score

Notes:

1. Data based on police recorded crime are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Police recorded crime rates and Crime Severity Score cannot be compared in terms of the level of crime because they are represented on different scales.

Crime Severity Score by geographical area

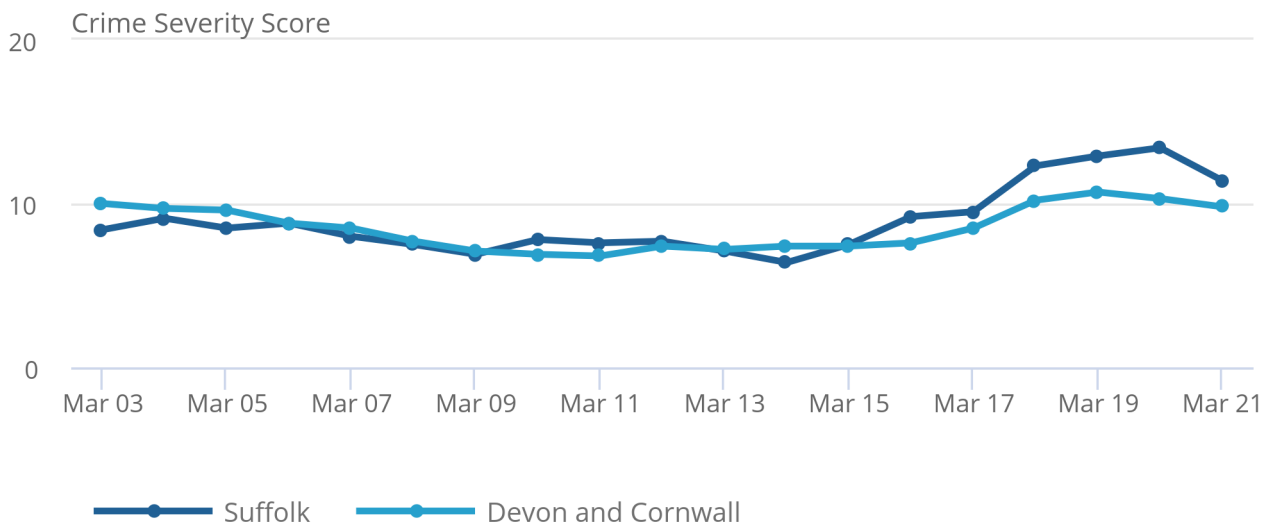
The Crime Severity Score can be used to obtain a further understanding of the crime profile and demand on a police force over time. Trends in severity scores between police force areas as well as community safety partnerships across England and Wales can be compared (Figure 2), and the underlying weights for each offence examined. This enables results to be reproduced at a more granular level.

Figure 2: Trends in Crime Severity Score for Suffolk and Devon and Cornwall

Year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2021

Figure 2: Trends in Crime Severity Score for Suffolk and Devon and Cornwall

Year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Crime Severity Score

The CSS data tool and similar indexes, such as the Cambridge Crime Harm Index (CHI), provide a valuable and simple way to compare crime severity over time and across geographies, as well as being important tools for understanding demands on the police. However, it is important to note that these measures are limited by their reliance on police recorded crime and sentencing data or guidelines alone. Police recorded crime does not capture crimes that are not reported to the police and trends can be influenced by changes in recording practices and police activity. In addition, sentencing data or guidelines alone may not capture the full picture and complexity of the impact of crime on individuals and society.

4 . Crime harm interactive database

Our new [crime harm interactive database](#) aims to collate additional data sources and outcome measures related to the impacts of crime on individuals and society in order to complement the Crime Severity Score (CSS) data tool and provide a more holistic picture of crime harm. It includes sources of data that measure crime that is not reported to the police, such as the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), as well as data that measure the harm caused by crime across different domains, such as hospital admissions data.

The crime harm interactive database allows for easy access to statistics containing relevant data. The included statistics are conveniently collated in one location, are publicly available and are mostly classed as official statistics and usually adhere to the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

5 . Impacts of crime on victims

The database contains a wide range of outcomes and data sources relevant to individual level crime harms. These are organised into the following categories:

- physical harms
- emotional or psychological harms
- financial or economic harms
- privacy

Physical harms

These harms encompass a wide range of outcomes related to physical damage including death, injury, or violence across multiple data sources. Main indicators include:

- violence with injury offences (Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW))
- type of injury sustained during violent offences (CSEW)
- homicide (Home Office Homicide Index)
- hospital admissions for assault with a knife or sharp object (NHS Hospital Episodic Statistics and NHS Wales)

The CSEW provides a reliable measure of violence with injury offences and the types of injuries sustained across England and Wales at a national level. The Homicide Index and hospital data provide a better indicator of serious violence and physical harm at a sub-national level

The database also contains links to other indicators of physical harms, such as the [Violence in England and Wales in 2020: An Accident and Emergency Perspective \(PDF, 773KB\)](#) publication, which measures emergency department attendance for injuries caused by violence using National Violence Surveillance Network data.

Emotional or psychological harms

These harms cover a range of emotional and psychological impacts such as emotional distress and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Main measures include:

- emotional impacts and their severity (CSEW Nature of Crime publications)
- symptoms of depression and anxiety (Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales)

The national Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS) provides detailed data on adult mental illness and access to services. It is a cross-sectional survey carried out approximately every seven years. The [2007 and 2014 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Surveys](#) contained questions on violence and abuse, so that their relationship with poor mental health can be explored.

Financial or economic harms

These harms refer to all material losses, such as loss of money and possessions, damage to personal property that results in financial costs, as well as time taken off work and loss of wages. The main financial and economic harm indicators include:

- financial and property loss (CSEW Nature of Crime publications, appendix tables and other related tables)
- occupational impacts such as time taken off work or loss of employment (selected CSEW Nature of Crime publications)

Privacy related harms

Data on these harms cover crimes associated with breach of privacy. For instance, burglary where the home space is invaded, various types of cyber-attacks and fraud where personal information is accessed maliciously. Main privacy measures include:

- invasion of privacy by force entry to a property (CSEW and police recorded crime in Crime in England and Wales: appendix tables)
- invasion of privacy via computer misuse (CSEW and police recorded crime in Crime in England and Wales: appendix tables and CSEW Nature of Crime: fraud and computer misuse)

The impact of invasion of privacy via computer misuse varies significantly depending on the nature of the offence. For example, a large-scale data breach resulting in access to an individual's name and email address is likely to have a very different impact on an individual compared with having personal photos stolen in a phone hacking.

6 . Wider impacts of crime

Wider impacts of crime refer to crimes against society, such as public order offences and anti-social behaviour, crimes against businesses and organisations, as well as the impact crimes against individuals, communities and institutions have on wider society. For example, costs related to preventing and responding to crime.

Community level

Whole communities can be affected by crime regardless of whether individuals are direct victims of crime or not. For example, anti-social behaviour can impact on perceptions of safety and have negative impacts on the local environment, while fear of crime can limit social functioning and impact community cohesion. Main indicators include:

- fear of crime and antisocial behaviour (CSEW Annual Supplementary Tables and Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN))
- crimes against society – such as drug offences, possession of weapons or public order offences (Police Recorded Crime PFA Tables and Public Health Profiles)

The [OPN Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment, Great Britain](#) publication covers perceptions of safety in the local area, perceptions of safety after experiencing harassment, and any resulting behavioural changes.

Institutional level

Data sources related to private and public sector entities contain indicators of financial or economic harms and invasion of privacy. Main indicators include:

- financial or property loss (Commercial Victimization Survey (CVS))
- occupational impacts (Economic and Social Costs of Crime, selected CSEW Nature of Crime publications)
- invasion of privacy (Cyber Security Breaches Survey (CSBS))

While the Home Office [Commercial Victimization Survey](#) was designed to measure crimes against businesses in England and Wales, the [Cyber Security Breaches Survey](#) was set up by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to understand the nature and significance of the cyber security threats they face, including the cost and impact of breaches. The survey is representative of UK organisations and surveys, both businesses and charities.

Society level

Crimes against individuals, communities and institutions also impact on society as a whole. These impacts are predominantly financial and result from expenditure on anticipating crime, consequences of crime and responding to crime. For example, use of victim services and charity run helplines, or being treated by the NHS because of a physical injury sustained from a violent incident. Main indicators include:

- use of public services (Department for Education – Looked After Children data, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children – Childline data and Home Office – Economic and Social Costs of Crime publication)

The Home Office [Economic and Social Costs of Crime publication \(PDF, 1.75MB\)](#) estimates the economic and social costs of crime using a range of data sources that provide information on crime and related costs. The latest estimate for the total cost of crimes in England and Wales was approximately £59 billion in the year ending March 2016.

7 . Future developments

The current versions of both the Crime Severity Score (CSS) data tool and the newly developed crime harm interactive database aim to improve our understanding of the severity of different crimes and how they impact on individuals and society.

While we have collated publicly available data on the impact of crime into the crime harm interactive database, we are aware that there are potentially more sources of data and further work to link existing datasets that may help to better understand crime harm. It is likely that experiences of crime may have impacts on individuals across their life course in ways that are not captured within the data sources and outcomes collated in the current database. Linking crime data with other data sources across education, employment and health are potential areas for further research.

In addition, further evaluation of available crime harm outcomes is needed to develop any standardised measure of crime harm. While developing a standardised measure of crime harm is out of scope for this publication, any future work would need to consider:

- how to evaluate which data sources and outcomes data are most appropriate for measuring the range of impacts crime can have on individuals and society
- how to collate and standardise a wide-ranging set of measures to best present a picture of crime harm at a local and national level across England and Wales

We are keen to receive feedback from users on the CSS data tool and the content of the crime harm interactive database. If you have any feedback or suggestions for further development, please email us at crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk.

8 . Related links

[Crime Severity Score](#)

Dataset | 19 October 2021

Crime Severity Score data for police force areas and community safety partnerships, which equate in the majority of instances to local authorities. Includes a data tool to enable production of summary charts on trends and comparisons between areas.

[Research outputs: developing a Crime Severity Score for England and Wales using data on crimes recorded by the police](#)

Article | 30 November 2016

The methods behind the Crime Severity Score and initial findings.

[Crime harm interactive database](#)

Dataset | 30 March 2022

The crime harm interactive database collates relevant data sources and organises them by outcome measures related to the impacts of crime on individuals and society.