

Public concerns about organised crime

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This report presents findings from a study that explored the nature and extent of public concern about organised crime. The study drew on two sources of data: ten in-depth focus groups and a telephone survey of 1,000 randomly selected members of the public. The impetus for this research was the 2004 Organised Crime White Paper which pointed to the need to examine the level of public concern about organised crime and the harm associated with it. Rather than assessing the effectiveness of a specific policy initiative, the work was carried out to increase the wider contextual evidence base on organised crime, specifically focusing on public perception and concerns.

- Respondents reported having limited access to information about organised crime from official sources, and perceptions of organised crime were generally drawn from its representation in films and on television. Respondents felt they would benefit from more information about organised crime and the harm it causes.
- All crimes – from low-level localised anti-social behaviour, vehicle theft and burglary through to international drug and people smuggling/trafficking – were perceived to potentially be organised. Some forms of crime were considered to be more organised than others: in particular, drug dealing,

people smuggling, credit card fraud, extortion, protection rackets, counterfeiting, prostitution and paedophile rings.

- Respondents believed that organised crime causes high levels of harm to the country, with almost 70 per cent of telephone survey respondents agreeing that this is extremely serious or very serious. Sixty-seven per cent of respondents also thought there was more organised crime (when the interviews were conducted in 2006) than there had been two years previously.
- Some crimes which were considered to be organised – especially selling counterfeit goods, types of fraud and people smuggling/trafficking – did not elicit the same levels of concern as crimes such as burglary or vehicle crime. However, while these crimes did not elicit the highest levels of concern for individuals, they were associated with perceived high levels of harm on a national level.
- There was little recognition that money generated by sales of pirate and counterfeit goods can flow into the criminal economy, and can be used to fund other types of – more directly harmful – organised crime. Consideration should therefore be given to providing the public with more information about how seemingly trivial purchases of illegal goods can fund serious crime.

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Keywords

Organised crime
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Background

This report sets out the findings of a study that sought to understand the harms that the public associate with organised crimes, and the extent of their concerns about them. In doing so, it draws upon data from ten two-hour qualitative focus groups and a telephone survey of a randomly selected sample of 1,000 members of the public. The impetus for this research was the 2004 *Organised Crime White Paper* which pointed to the need to examine the level of public concern about organised crime and the harm associated with it. Some problems, like the availability of drugs, are known to cause widespread public concern but little is known about the nature of concern about other forms of organised criminality.

Results

Access to information about organised crime

Respondents reported having limited access to information about organised crime from official (government and law enforcement) sources. Their knowledge of organised criminality came from national and local newspapers, television programmes and films, through word of mouth and via other local information (newsletters, for example). Reflecting this, respondents' understanding of organised crime was based largely on its image in popular culture, notably its representation in films and on television.

Forms and characteristics of organised crime

Survey and focus group respondents did not believe that organised criminality is confined to specific crime types. Any crime – from low-level localised anti-social behaviour, vehicle theft and burglary through to international drug and people smuggling/trafficking – could potentially be organised. Nevertheless, some forms of crime were considered to be more organised than others, for example drug dealing, people smuggling/trafficking, credit card fraud, extortion, protection rackets, counterfeiting, prostitution

and paedophile rings. Focus group respondents did, however, report that crimes which were organised had certain characteristics: they were considered to be structured and businesslike, planned, and associated with some kind of personal gain.

Harms associated with organised crime

Respondents believed that organised crime causes high levels of harm to the country, with almost 70 per cent of the telephone survey respondents agreeing that the harm caused by organised crime is extremely serious or very serious. Organised crime was also perceived to be increasing; 67 per cent of respondents thought there was more organised crime (when the interviews were conducted in 2006) than there had been two years previously.

However, focus group respondents did not differentiate between the harms associated with organised crime and those with crime in general. Harm was primarily associated with the potential consequence of a crime. The most harmful were those crimes which had an impact on the physical, emotional or financial well-being of the victim. 'Medium serious' harms were identified as those that impacted on the wider community but which had a less immediate physical or emotional impact on them as individuals. These included, for example, the breakdown of community relationships as anxieties about crime increased, negative impressions being made on young people (for instance 'glamorising' certain types of crime), or an area acquiring a bad reputation. The least harmful crimes were those where the consequences were dispersed by being carried by institutions or society as a whole, rather than by individuals. These harms resulted in costs to business, to the economy (including revenue and tax losses), to the criminal justice system and to wider public services.

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Respondents were most concerned about crimes they had personally experienced or worried about on a day-to-day basis. These included drug-related crimes, anti-social behaviour, mugging, assault, burglary and theft. Very serious violent or sexual crimes such as murder, rape and terrorism were, of course, associated with high levels of personal harm although for most respondents these crimes did not evoke day-to-day concerns. Forms of fraud, shoplifting, vandalism, motoring offences (such as speeding), tax evasion and benefit fraud were widely considered to be low-level crimes and elicited little concern. Crimes often considered organised – especially selling counterfeit goods, types of fraud and people smuggling/trafficking – did not elicit the same levels of concern as crimes such as burglary or vehicle crime. Harms associated with fraud and counterfeiting were seen to be absorbed more widely by business or the economy, and people smuggling/trafficking was seen as unlikely to result in personal harm to the public.

Impact of organised crime on society

Respondents differed in their views regarding the crimes considered most harmful at national level, at the community level, and at individual level. All the crime types that respondents were asked about – which included a range of organised and non-organised crimes – were considered to be harmful at the national level. Among the most harmful were some crimes usually considered to be organised, such as drug trafficking, gun crime and forms of fraud. Other organised crimes, such as people smuggling/trafficking and selling counterfeit goods, were seen to cause comparatively less harm at the national level. At the community level (with the exception of drug dealing), organised crimes were not considered to be among the most harmful. Instead, crimes not ordinarily thought of as organised such as burglary, vandalism, car theft and street robbery were reported as being the most harmful. At the individual level, burglary raised the most concern (although drug dealing and credit card fraud also continued to cause high levels of individual worry). Again, comparatively, organised crimes such as people smuggling/trafficking and counterfeiting produced some of the lowest levels of *personal worry*.

Conclusion

Many respondents thought that organised crime causes serious harm to the country and that it had increased over the two years preceding the study.

Crime (organised or otherwise) was considered to generate high levels of harm at both national and local levels, and also generated a great deal of individual worry. Respondents assessed harm on the basis of the extent to which a crime impacted, or had the potential to impact on the physical and emotional well-being of a victim. The degree of concern about crimes had different immediacy depending on whether that harm was seen to impact most on the individual, the community, or on society more generally. Crimes that impact at the individual level were considered the most harmful and those impacting on the wider societal or business level the least harmful. Some forms of organised crime – such as counterfeiting and certain frauds – elicit lower levels of concern because the harms associated with them are ordinarily absorbed by the wider economy and society rather than directly by individuals. Other forms of organised crime such as people smuggling and trafficking were considered to be harmful for the individuals affected but overall were associated with lower levels of concern because the likelihood of becoming a victim of such activities is low. A clear exception is drug dealing, which was widely considered to generate high levels of harm nationally, within communities, and for individuals.

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I. Background, aims and methods

Introduction

Concern about the harm caused by organised crime has grown over recent years and the Government is strongly committed to tackling organised criminality. This is reflected in the 2004 *Organised Crime White Paper*¹, the 2005 *Serious Organised Crime and Police Act* and the subsequent establishment of the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) which specifically aims to reduce the harm caused by serious organised crime.

Defining organised crime precisely is problematic. The method of committing a crime rather than the type of offence is usually stressed. The *Organised Crime White Paper* defined organised criminals as:

'those involved, normally working with others, in continuing serious criminal activities for substantial profit, whether based in the UK or elsewhere.'

In this definition, organised crime is taken to be a group activity generally aimed at making money. Nevertheless, some crimes are considered more intrinsically organised than others. Based on the *UK 2006/7 Threat Assessment*², SOCA identifies Class A drug trafficking, organised immigration crime, and various forms of fraud to be the most serious organised crime threats to the UK. SOCA also identifies a range of other organised crime types which include hi-tech crime, counterfeiting and forgery, the use of firearms by serious criminals, serious robbery, organised vehicle crime and cultural property crime (e.g. theft of art and antiques).

The impetus for this research was the 2004 *Organised Crime White Paper* which pointed to the need to examine the level of public concern about organised crime and the harm associated with it. Some problems, like the availability of drugs, are known to cause widespread public concern but little is known about the nature of concern about other forms of organised criminality. The White Paper also notes that organised crime activities can take place against a backdrop of intimidation and fear, can be associated with firearms, and can contribute to lower-level crime and anti-social behaviour through creating illicit markets for drugs and alcohol.

No specific survey programme in England and Wales examines public concern about organised crime. The following sections briefly discuss existing sources of data on the nature of public concern about organised crime and the harm that it is associated with.

- The British Crime Survey (BCS) focuses primarily on measuring the extent of victimisation rather than on measuring perceptions of harm associated with crime types (for example, see Kershaw, et al., 2008). It does ask about levels of worry about crimes such as burglary, car crime and violence but it does not routinely examine levels of worry about types of organised crimes. More recently the British Crime Survey has contained specific questions on experiences and perceptions of fraud (Flatley, 2007).
- The Offending, Crime and Justice Survey, conducted by the Home Office between 2003 and 2006, measured levels of offending and collated information on some crime types of interest here including counterfeit goods, internet crime, selling class A drugs and gang membership (Roe and Ashe, 2008). Again, it did not focus on public concern about the harms caused by these crimes.
- The Home Office Economic Crime Survey 2004 (run in conjunction with Robson Rhodes and the Fraud Advisory Panel) examined types of economic crime

1 *One Step Ahead: A 21st Century Strategy to Defeat Organised Criminals*. Government White Paper, 2004. See: http://press.homeoffice.gov.uk/press-releases/One_Step_Ahead_A_21st_Century_St?version=1
2 SOCA 2006. Full report available at: http://www.soca.gov.uk/assessPublications/downloads/threat_assess_unclass_250706.pdf

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affecting UK retail companies, the average loss per company and other commercial consequences. As such, this survey contains information about organised crime but is limited to the retail sector, to certain kinds of organised crime (frauds against business), and then only to the economic harms that it causes.

- The Northern Ireland Organised Crime Task Force published the results of a detailed survey of public attitudes to – and motivations for – purchasing counterfeit goods in 2005 (Bryce and Rutter, 2005). Again, this was limited to specific crime types and did not seek to examine concerns about organised crime more widely.
- The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency has surveyed views about organised crime in the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey. However, organised crime coverage is somewhat limited to a small number of questions primarily focusing on how it is tackled. In addition, the survey does not cover other parts of the UK.

Aims of this study

To date, there has then been little work conducted on the nature of public concern about organised crime. To address the lack of information on this issue, this study sought to examine the following issues.

- What does the public know about organised crime and where do they get this information?
- How does the public define organised crime and which crimes are considered to be organised and why?
- What types of harm do the public think that organised crime causes and which are considered the most severe?
- What level of harm does the public think that organised crime causes nationally, to their community, and to the individual?
- How should organised crime be tackled?

Methods

To address these aims, a series of focus groups and a telephone survey of a random sample of the population were conducted.

Ten two-hour qualitative focus groups were conducted with members of the public in England and Wales. Each group contained between seven and nine respondents. The purpose of the focus groups was firstly to gain a detailed qualitative understanding of the nature of public concern about organised crime, and secondly to inform the development of the survey. The focus group sample was designed to ensure the inclusion of a mix of characteristics of the general public including gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic group, rural and urban mix and life stage. The group discussions took place between 20 and 28 February 2006. The detailed sample structure can be seen in Appendix 1.

The telephone survey aimed to provide quantifiable information on the nature and extent of public concerns about organised crime. The sample consisted of a randomly selected cross section of 1,000 members of the public including those listed as ex-directory. All respondents were aged 16 or over living in England or Wales. The main fieldwork was conducted between 3 May and 13 July 2006. The response rate was 33.9 per cent (after adjustments for business numbers, duplicates, and numbers not in service). In order to address possible response bias, data were weighted to reflect national population and household demographics using updated 2004 population estimates. More details about the survey are provided in Appendix 2.

The structure of this report broadly follows the research aims. The study firstly examines the sources of information about organised crime that respondents had access to and their views on the forms and characteristics of organised crime. It then identifies those harms that were associated with organised crime and sets out the level of perceived harm and worry caused by organised crime. Lastly, it examines people's views about how to tackle organised crime.

2. Results

Public definitions and understanding of organised crime

This section sets out the study's findings on reported sources of information about organised crime, the perceived characteristics of organised criminality and the degree to which particular crimes are considered to be organised.

Sources of information about organised crime

Survey respondents reported limited access to sources of information about organised crime. Information was rarely received from official sources (such as the Government or the police) and respondents felt that official information about organised crime was restricted and unlikely to be released to the general public. Instead, information about organised crime was more commonly obtained from the press, community newsletters or emails, television programmes such as *Crimewatch* and *Watchdog*, word of mouth, gossip with friends and family, and local knowledge about their local area or community.

Views of organised criminality were drawn largely from its representation in popular culture. Focus group respondents associated organised criminality with the acts and behaviour represented in films such as *The Godfather*, television shows such as *The Sopranos*, in certain types of rap music and with nostalgic representations of the past such as the glamorous portrayal of the Kray twins in London's East End during the 1960s.

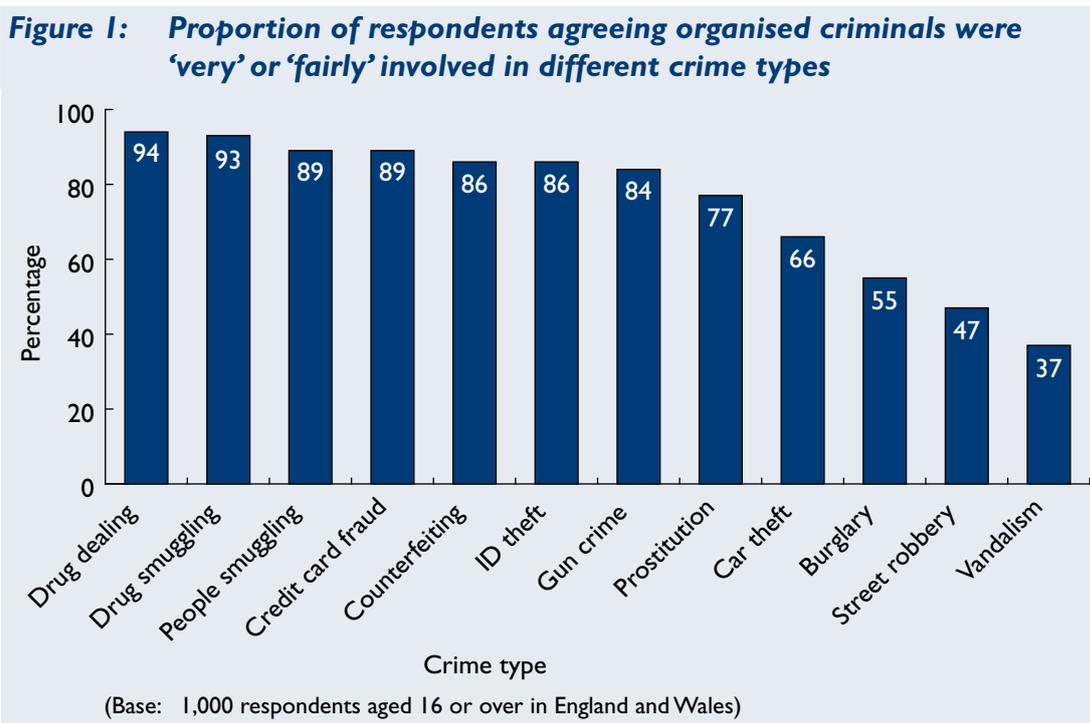
Forms and characteristics of organised crime

Focus group respondents did not generally believe that organised criminality is confined to specific crime types. Low-level localised anti-social behaviour and burglary through to international drug and people smuggling³ were all considered to be *potentially* organised. Nevertheless, when prompted, some forms of crimes were considered more likely to be organised than others. Typical examples of organised criminality spontaneously given by focus group respondents included credit card fraud, extortion, protection rackets, counterfeiting, prostitution, paedophile rings and people smuggling. In

addition, respondents thought that organised crimes have several key attributes. Organised criminality was perceived to be businesslike, planned, structured, hierarchical and associated with financial (or other) gain for the offender.

The point that many different types of crime could in principle be organised, but some were more likely to be organised than others, was reflected in the survey results. Survey respondents were asked to read the 2004 *Organised Crime White Paper* definition of organised crime (as cited in the introductory section of this report). They were then given a list of offences and asked to comment on how involved they thought UK-based organised criminals or groups were in each offence category. The results for proportions agreeing that organised criminals were very or fairly involved in these crime types are shown in Figure 1 below.

Drug dealing and smuggling were typically considered organised: 94 per cent and 93 per cent of respondents respectively stated that organised criminals were 'very' or 'fairly' involved. People smuggling and credit card fraud were also commonly considered to be organised



with 89 per cent of respondents stating that organised criminals were very involved or fairly involved in these offences. A similar proportion of respondents (86%) thought that organised criminals were very or fairly involved in counterfeiting. Vandalism, street robbery and burglary were perceived as least likely to be organised. Respondents' perceptions of the crimes considered to be

3 It should be noted that although the term 'people smuggling' is referred to throughout the main section of this report, respondents did not generally distinguish between smuggling and other forms of organised immigration crime. Therefore, references to smuggling can be taken to refer to people trafficking also.

most organised are broadly similar to the Government's priorities for organised crimes (Class A drug trafficking, organised immigration crime, excise fraud, VAT fraud and fraud against the private sector).

Public perceptions of harm caused by organised crime

The following sections set out the findings in respect of the sorts of harms that the public associated with organised crime, which harms were considered to be most serious, and the types of organised crime which were considered to result in the most harm.

Harms associated with organised crime

The harms associated with organised crimes were perceived in the same way as those harms associated with crime in general. Focus group respondents reported that the consequences of the crime were more important than whether the crime was organised or not.

'I don't think whether it is organised or unorganised, it doesn't make any difference. It is the actual act that affects you.'

(Group 4, Cardiff)

Focus group respondents' primary concerns were harms that impacted on the personal well-being of the individual, in particular those that directly impacted on the individual in terms of physical, emotional and psychological damage, and – to a lesser degree – a person's finances.

'The ones that threaten our personal security, welfare and well-being.'

(Group 2, Leeds)

Respondents also identified a number of harms that could impact on their wider community but had less immediate physical and emotional impact on individuals. These included: neighbours becoming concerned about local crime and criminals; the breakdown of community relationships as anxieties and suspicions about their neighbours grow; a local area acquiring a bad reputation; the impact on house prices; and the negative influence on young people who may become involved in or become victims of crime.

'It [crime] probably pushes people away and they become more suspicious of other people.'

(Group 3, Coalville)

'The insurance goes up and the house prices could go down if it is a bad area.'

(Group 6, Berkshire)

Respondents also identified a range of harms to wider society which included the costs to business, the costs to the economy (including revenue and tax losses), the costs to the criminal justice system, the costs to the wider public services and the impact on tourism. These wider harms, however, were regarded as having a lower impact because they had less immediate relevance for most respondents.

Overall, for the focus group respondents, the crimes that elicited the greatest concern were those that resulted in direct harm to the person. Organised crime was an abstract notion for most respondents and levels of concern about organised crimes were judged on the same basis as concerns about crime more generally: the greater the potential impact on the individual, the greater the level of concern about the crime.

The crimes that concerned people most were those that people had personally experienced or worried about on a day-to-day basis. These included drug-related crimes, anti-social behaviour, mugging, assault, burglary and theft.

'It is what you can immediately imagine happening like theft and break-in and property being threatened.'

(Group 2, Leeds)

Violent and sexual crimes such as murder, rape and terrorism were, of course, perceived to cause high levels of personal harm. However, for most respondents these did not evoke daily concerns.

'Don't you worry about your car being stolen more than you being murdered? You don't think you are going to be murdered do you but you think you might get your car stolen?'

(Group 5, Southampton)

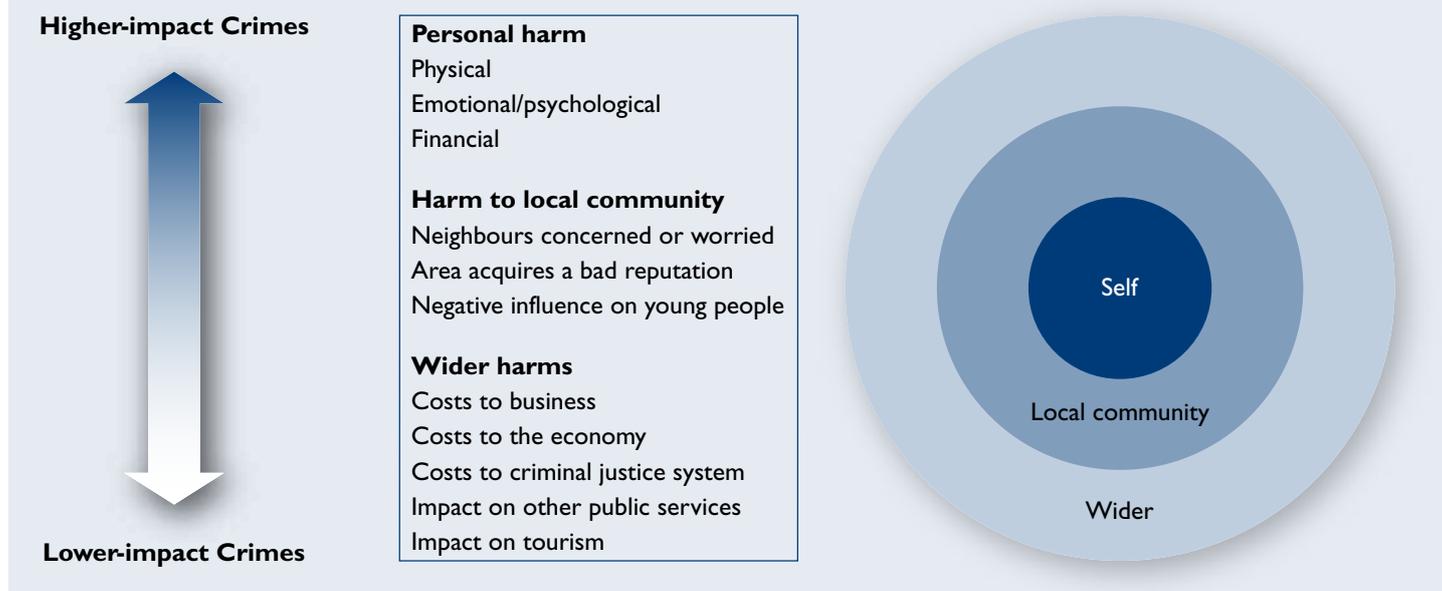
Crimes such as fraud, shoplifting, vandalism, motor crime (such as speeding), tax evasion and benefit fraud were widely considered by respondents to be low-level crimes. They were associated with harms to wider society, businesses and to the economy rather than to individuals. As such, they did not evoke the same levels of individual concern because the harm was being absorbed elsewhere.

'But it [tax evasion] doesn't affect the individual. It affects the economy... it is not going to affect me.'

(Group 8, London)

The focus groups suggested that crimes considered to be the most harmful are those that have the potential to cause personal damage to individuals, and the level of concern about specific criminality is fuelled by the extent to which they have experienced it or feel that they are likely to experience it. Those that elicit the least

Figure 2: Perceived harms associated with crimes



perceived harm are those associated with wider costs to the economy, businesses and other public services. This is shown diagrammatically in Figure 2.

The focus group respondents were asked about their concerns regarding specific examples of organised crime including selling and buying counterfeit goods, forms of excise fraud, and people and drug smuggling. Selling and purchasing counterfeit goods was considered to be a very low-level and commonplace crime, and elicited low levels of concern. Any harm was considered to be absorbed more widely in terms of financial losses for business and the economy.

'It doesn't harm us but it harms the economy. It harms the people who are making the DVDs... It isn't harming me. It is benefiting me. It is taking money out of their pockets and not mine.'

(Group 1, Manchester)

Being given information about the financial impact for the taxpayer and potential job losses within the creative industries did not alter respondents' views. It was generally felt that the sale of counterfeit goods affected large companies who could afford the losses.

'I think if nobody has been hurt and if they are ripping off a big company then I think it is genius! If you are intelligent enough to do it and get away with it then fair enough. They are not hurting individuals or people. If they are ripping off... a multi-billion pound company, they are not even going to notice.'

(Group 5, Southampton)

Illegally purchasing cheap rolling tobacco (a form of excise fraud) also elicited low levels of concern. Again,

respondents associated any harm with lost revenue to the Treasury rather than to the individual and indeed it was considered beneficial if they themselves were smokers.

'The Government try to say it costs hundreds of millions a year to the taxpayer but the man smoking his tobacco is not going to see that when he sees £2 on a packet.'

(Group 1, Manchester)

Human smuggling, on the other hand, was considered a high-profile crime associated with high levels of personal harm for those involved. Many respondents referred to press coverage of the issue and discussed their concerns about the human rights implications. However, for most respondents this crime did not affect their daily lives and so elicited minimal levels of day-to-day concern.

'We are more likely to be affected by [burglary and robbery] than illegal immigrants picking up cockles or looking after poultry. It doesn't affect us personally does it?'

(Group 4, Cardiff)

Where people were reliant, or potentially reliant, on the type of jobs perceived as typical of those undertaken by illegal immigrants, the level of concern was higher.

'If you are the manager and you are paying someone cheap then it is better for you but if you are not the manager and you have missed out on a job then it is a pain in the backside.'

(Group 1, Manchester)

In an open question, telephone survey respondents were asked to state spontaneously which type of organised crime they considered to be the most harmful. The results

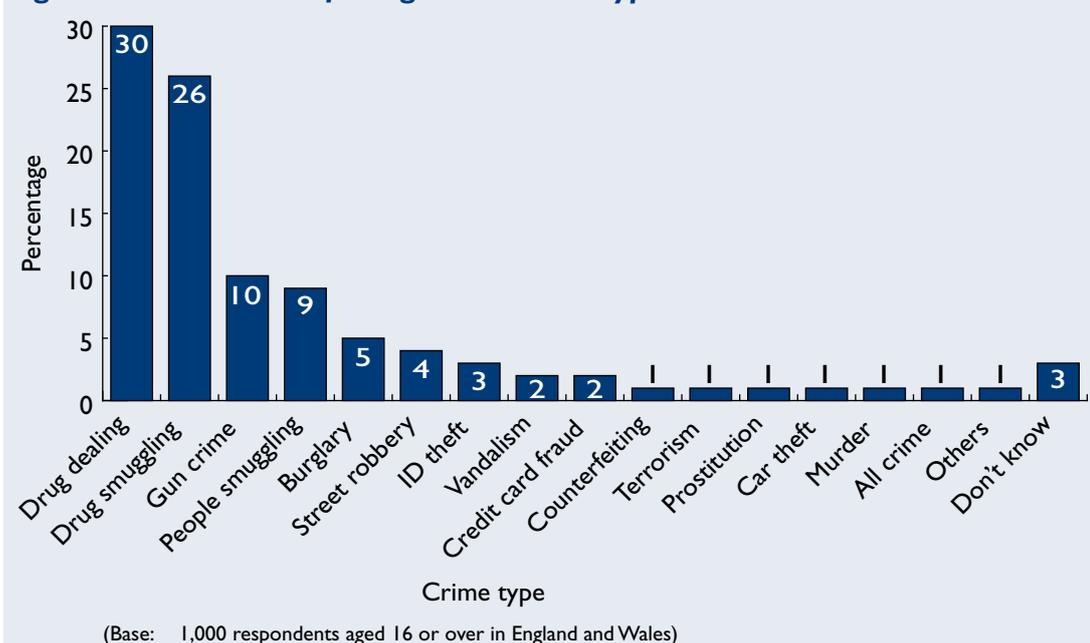
can be seen in Figure 3. The majority of respondents felt that the most harmful organised crimes were drug-related. Together, 56 per cent of the respondents stated that drug dealing or drug smuggling were the most harmful organised crimes. This was followed by gun crime (10%) and people smuggling (9%). Only five per cent of respondents felt that organised burglary was the most harmful, with three per cent citing ID theft, and two per cent each citing organised vandalism and credit card fraud.

Regarding the organised crime type that they considered most harmful, telephone survey respondents were asked

to state the extent to which they felt it resulted in a range of harms. Examples for the five offences considered most harmful are given in Table 1.

It is clear that organised crime types which respondents perceived to be the most harmful were associated with a wide range of different types of harm. However, organised crimes that respondents identified as the most harmful were considered to result more in physical and emotional harms to victims, and in harms to the local community. Respondents also identified them with harms to the wider economy and to businesses but not to the same extent.

Figure 3: Most harmful organised crime type



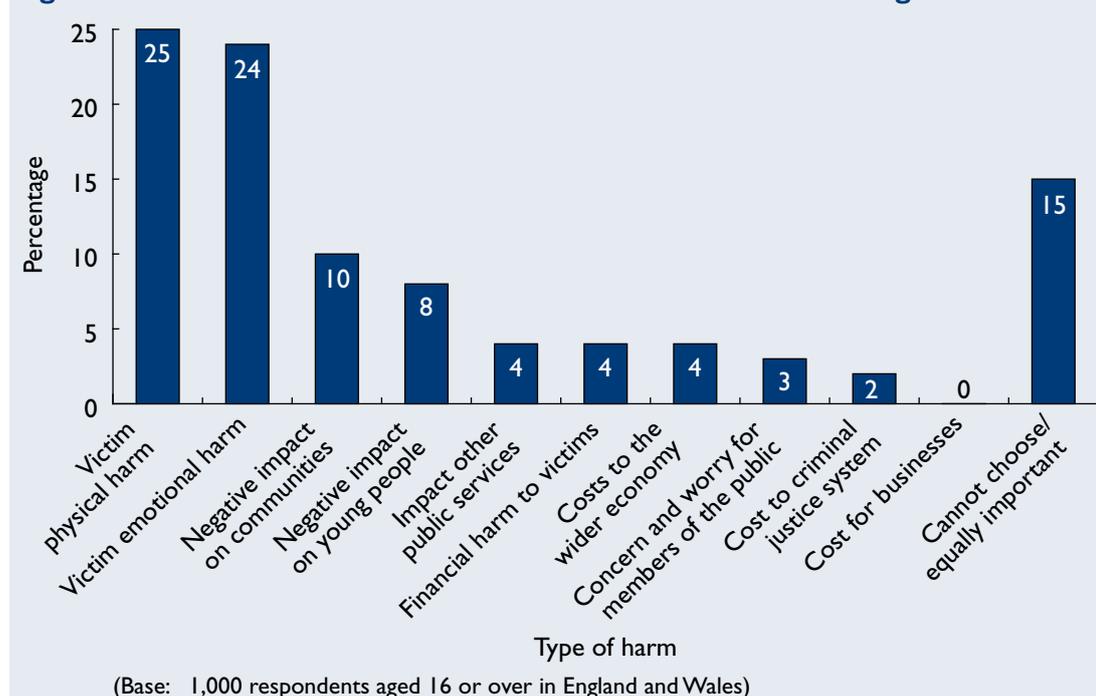
As has been seen from the focus groups, organised criminality was associated with a wide range of different types of harm, from physical and emotional harm to individuals, to harm to the local community and wider harms to the economy, businesses and the public services. Telephone survey respondents were also asked to state which type of harm (associated with the organised crime they thought most serious) was the most important. The results are shown in Figure 4.

Table 1: Most serious organised crime type and extent to which it is likely to result in forms of harm

	Crime type and extent to which it is considered very or fairly likely to result in that kind of harm (%)				
	Drug dealing	Drug smuggling	Gun crime	People smuggling	Burglary
Physical harm to victims	98	97	98	95	95
Emotional harm	97	100	98	98	100
Financial harm	98	98	86	92	100
Negative impact on young people	96	99	98	83	81
Negative impact on communities	99	98	94	89	96
Concern and worry to the public	97	99	95	93	100
Costs to businesses	79	81	77	67	90
Costs to the wider economy	86	86	79	82	87
Costs to the criminal justice system	97	97	84	93	93
Impact on other public services	94	95	89	85	78

(Base: 1,000 respondents aged 16 or over in England and Wales)

Figure 4: Most serious harms associated with most serious organised crimes



organised crime now than there was two years ago.⁴ This resonates with recent findings from the British Crime Survey about perceptions of crime in general. The 2005/2006 BCS survey showed that 63 per cent of people in England and Wales thought that crime in the country had increased over the last year (Walker, et al., 2006).

Survey respondents were asked to state the degree of harm (from 'no harm at all' to 'a lot of harm') they believed was caused by a range of crimes at

Again, reflecting findings of the focus groups, respondents felt that the gravest harms were those that had the most direct impact on the individual themselves in terms of physical and emotional well-being. Overall, 25 per cent stated that the most serious harm that crime resulted in was physical harm to the individual, closely followed by emotional harm to the individual (24%) and the negative impact it had on communities (10%). Fewer respondents stated that the most serious harm was the wider impact, such as the costs to the criminal justice system, the costs to the UK economy, and, particularly, costs for businesses. Also noteworthy was that a significant proportion of respondents (15%) felt they were unable to choose the most serious harm, or felt that no single type of harm stood out as most damaging.

The degree of harm and worry caused by organised crime

This section sets out the harm respondents perceived to be caused by organised crime at the national and local neighbourhood level, and examines the amount of personal worry about different forms of crime.

Overall, respondents believed that organised crime causes high levels of harm to the country. Almost 70 per cent of respondents agreed that the harm caused by organised crime is extremely serious or very serious. The survey also showed that levels of organised crime were perceived to be increasing, with 67 per cent stating that there is more

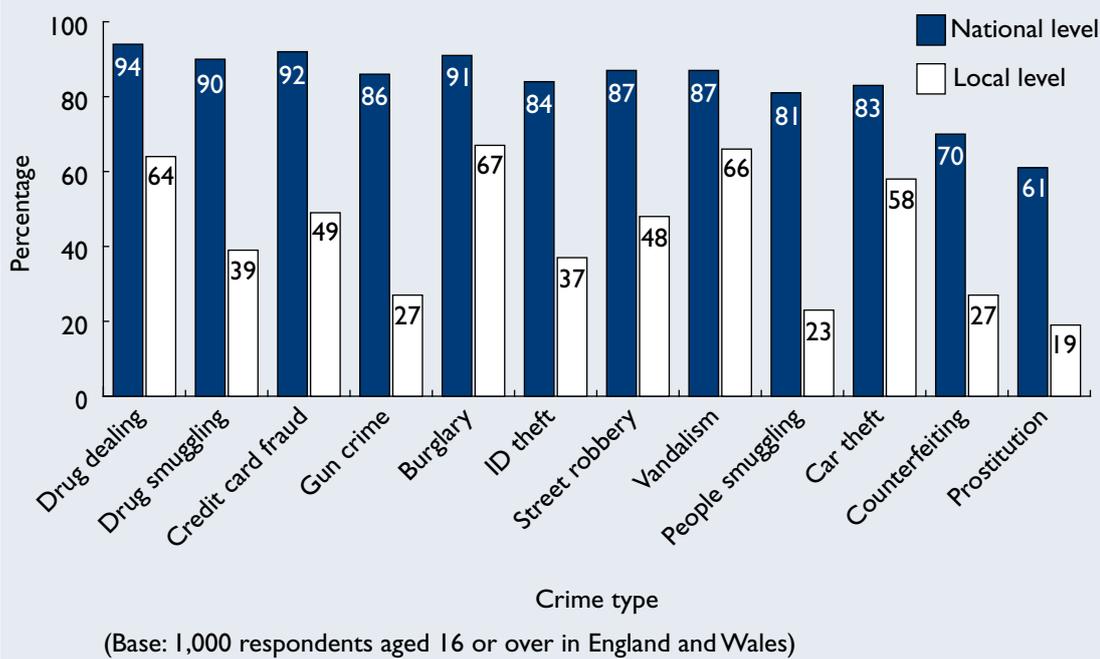
the national level and community level. The extent to which respondents believed these crime types were associated with 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' of harm nationally and to their community are shown in Figure 5.

It is clear that most crime types were associated with high levels of harm nationally. Drug dealing was considered to be most harmful with 94 per cent of respondents stating that it caused a lot or a fair amount of harm. This was followed by credit card fraud (92%), burglary (91%), drug smuggling (90%) and gun crime (86%). Those crimes seen as comparatively less harmful were prostitution (with 61 per cent thinking it causes 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' of harm), counterfeiting (70%) and people smuggling (81%). This represents something of a mix: some organised crime types such as drug smuggling, some forms of fraud, and gun crimes were considered among the most harmful crime types at the national level, whereas others such as people smuggling and counterfeiting – although still widely perceived as harmful – were considered comparatively less so.

At the local level, different crime types were perceived to cause the most harm. Burglary and vandalism were assessed as causing the most harm, with 67 per cent and 66 per cent of respondents stating that these crime types cause a lot or a fair amount of harm respectively. This was followed by drug dealing (64%), car theft (58%) and credit card fraud (49%). Comparatively, respondents perceived gun crime, counterfeiting, people smuggling and prostitution to be least harmful at the local level.

⁴ It should be noted that the survey was conducted in 2006.

Figure 5: Percentage agreeing that ‘a lot’ or a ‘fair amount’ of harm is caused nationally and locally, by crime type



of worry. Again, the key organised crime priorities of people smuggling and counterfeiting elicited among the lowest levels of worry at the individual level.

The research provides some insight into why this might be the case. As has already been seen, the focus group respondents did not differentiate between the harms caused by organised crime and those caused by crime generally. Overall, the crimes (organised or not) that respondents were most

The perceived levels of harm caused by certain crime types locally appear to be reflected in the extent of a respondent’s personal worry about specific crime types. Survey respondents were asked to state the extent to which they were personally worried about the crime types on a scale from ‘not worried at all’ to ‘very worried’. The crime that caused the most worry at the individual level was burglary, followed by credit card fraud, drug dealing, vandalism and street robbery. Respondents were much less likely to be very or fairly worried about people smuggling, counterfeiting and prostitution.

There are differences then between those crimes which respondents considered to be most harmful to the country as a whole, at the community level, and those which elicit the highest levels of individual worry. At the national level, all the crime types that respondents were asked about were associated with high levels of harm. However, some forms of crime typically seen (by the Government and by the public themselves) as organised, such as drug trafficking, gun crime and forms of fraud, were perceived to be more harmful than others (notably, people smuggling and counterfeiting were considered comparatively less harmful). At the local and community level the situation was slightly different. With the exception of drug dealing (which is widely associated with high levels of harm), forms of organised crime were not considered among the most harmful locally. Drug dealing, burglary, vandalism, car theft and street robbery were considered to be the most harmful here. At the individual level, burglary, drug dealing and credit card fraud elicited the highest levels

concerned about were those that a) resulted in personal (especially physical and emotional) harm to the individual and b) those crimes they felt they might experience. The harms associated with certain forms of organised crimes are perceived to be widely diffused throughout society or unlikely to be experienced by most people. As such they elicit lower levels of concern.

Public views on tackling organised crime

This section sets out the findings in respect of the public’s views about how organised crime should be tackled. By and large, views on tackling organised crime were much the same as those for tackling crime generally.

Overall, sentencing for all crimes (organised or otherwise) was considered to be too lenient. Table 2 shows that the majority of those asked in the survey thought that sentencing for all crimes was too lenient or much too lenient (82%) and a similar proportion (79%) felt that sentencing for organised crimes was too lenient or much too lenient. This reflects the findings of the British Crime Survey which shows that three-quarters (76%) of respondents felt that sentences were too lenient (Allen, et al., 2006).

Table 2: Appropriateness of sentencing

	Organised crimes (%)	All crimes (%)
Much too lenient	55	61
Too lenient	24	21
About right	14	16
A little too tough	-	-
Much too tough	-	1
Don't know	6	-

(Base: 1,000 respondents aged 16 or over in England and Wales. A dash in the table refers to a value of less than one per cent.)

Overall, it was felt that greater efforts were required in tackling all crime, including organised crime. The focus group respondents suggested a number of ways that organised crime could be tackled.

- Consistent and harsher sentences were recommended across all the focus groups. Seizing assets from criminals was also deemed important to ensure that, on their release from prison, they could not continue to finance a criminal life style.
- An increased police presence on the streets was considered important for tackling all types of crime.
- Some respondents were aware of police surgeries within their local area where any concerns or reports of crimes could be discussed confidentially and it was suggested that police surgeries should be available in more areas.
- Some respondents proposed increasing police powers and ensuring that all police received specialised training regarding organised crime and criminals. A small minority of respondents suggested more armed police.
- Respondents felt that the public should take responsibility and report crimes. However, to encourage this, all reports of crimes (both minor and major) need to be taken seriously by the police and, if desired, anonymous reporting should be possible. Generally, people stated that they would be more willing to take more responsibility for reporting organised crime if they felt adequate police support and sentencing were in place.
- Respondents felt that communities should be encouraged to work together against tackling crime in general, including organised crime. Instigating

or developing Neighbourhood Watch groups or establishing community wardens were often mentioned as a means of achieving this.

- Across groups, respondents acknowledged that they had very little knowledge about organised crime. They felt that they would benefit from being educated about organised crime and the serious harms that it can cause.
- Educating through schools was considered an important way to discourage young people from committing crimes (organised or otherwise).

3. Conclusions

This study aimed to identify how people define organised crime, their views on the types of harm that it causes and levels of concern that it generates.

The research demonstrated that views and opinions about organised crime are largely based on its representation in television and films. Organised crime was considered to be businesslike in its structure and planning and ultimately associated with some form of personal gain, be it monetary or increased personal status. Given that respondents' views on organised crime are framed by its somewhat glamorous representation in films and on television, it is perhaps not surprising that they would perceive organised crime this way. This perception is, however, unlike the reality of modern organised crime networks which are more fluid and flexible in nature (SOCA, 2006).

The focus group respondents believed that any form of crime could be organised but crimes such as drug or people smuggling along with forms of fraud were considered most likely to be organised. These forms of organised crime are broadly reflected in the priorities of SOCA. Respondents believed that organised crime causes high levels of harm to the country, with almost 70 per cent of the telephone survey respondents agreeing that the harm caused by organised crime is extremely serious or very serious. Organised crime was also perceived to be increasing; 67 per cent of respondents thought there was more organised crime (when the interviews were conducted in 2006) than there had been two years previously.

It has been shown, though, that respondents do not differentiate between the harms caused by organised criminality and the harms caused by crime in general. The harm associated with a crime type was framed in terms of the severity of its impact and the probability of impact. Levels of concern were assessed on the basis of the extent to which a crime impacted on the physical and emotional well-being of the individual, combined with the extent to which people felt they were likely to experience it. The crimes individuals felt that they were likely to experience (or had experienced) and were believed to have high physical and/or emotional consequences for the victim generated the most concern. For respondents, physical and emotional damage to individuals was seen to be most harmful, followed by a range of community-level impacts (e.g. the negative impact on young people and the reputation of an area) and the least harmful were those consequences absorbed more widely by society (e.g. costs to the Treasury or business).

Perceptions of the relative harm caused by different crime types, coupled with the probability of occurrence, appeared to be the main drivers for concern. Crime (organised or otherwise) was clearly believed to cause high levels of harm nationally and locally and generated high levels of individual worry. However, levels of concern varied depending on whether it was considered to have most impact at the individual level, community level, or wider societal level. Those crimes that impact primarily at the individual level were considered the most harmful and those that affect the wider, societal and business level the least harmful.

This helps to explain why some forms of organised crimes were considered to be less harmful than other, 'non-organised' crime types. The harms associated with some organised crimes were considered to be primarily financial and absorbed by the wider economy, society and businesses rather than by individuals at a personal level. This is especially the case for some forms of fraud and counterfeiting. Other high-profile forms of organised crime such as people smuggling were considered to be harmful for the individuals affected and to generate harm to society as a whole. However, people smuggling was associated with lower levels of concern overall because most people were unlikely to have experienced it or to have been affected personally by it except in an indirect manner (the impact on the availability of jobs). A clear exception is drug dealing which is widely considered to cause high levels of harm to the country and at community level, and also elicits high levels of individual worry.

Lastly, this study aimed to identify the means through which the public think organised crime should be tackled. Again, respondents did not differentiate between organised crime and crime in general when suggesting ways in which it should be tackled. Overall, it was felt that greater efforts were required in tackling all forms of crime and suggestions for tackling organised crime were largely the same as those for tackling crime generally: tougher sentencing and a greater police presence.

Appendix I: Focus group sample structure

North	Group 1: Central Manchester Male 19- to 24-year-olds C2DE Unemployed/semi-skilled/unskilled workers	Group 2: Leeds (rural) Male and female 65+ year-olds ABCI Retired/semi-retired/working professionals Empty nesters
Midlands	Group 3: Coalville Female 16- to 19-year-olds C1C2 Students in further education/ pre-university	Group 7: Central Leicester Female 25- to 44-year-olds C1C2D Working part-time/ full-time Mix of young and older families Bangladeshi
	Group 9: Central Leicester Male and female 25- to 44-year-olds C1C2D Working and non-working Mix of young and older families Caribbean	
Wales	Group 4: Cardiff Male and female 35- to 54-year-olds BC1C2 Younger families	
South	Group 5: Southampton Male and female 25- to 34-year-olds ABCI Partnered pre-nesters	Group 8: London, Harrow Male 18- to 24-year-olds BC1 Studying full-time Indian
	Group 6: Newbury Male and female 55+ year-olds C1C2DE Mix of working and retired Older families	Group 10: London, Southwark Male and female 45- to 65-year-olds C1C2D Working and non-working Older families and empty nesters

Appendix 2: Survey details

The survey was conducted on behalf of the Home Office by GfK NOP Social Research.

Sampling

The survey used a random sample of landline telephone numbers in England and Wales (including those listed as ex-directory). This was sourced and provided by a third party – UK Changes. UK Changes take numbers from each exchange code and then generate new telephone numbers using the base area code, so that a sample is provided for each geographic area being surveyed. Numbers are called up to 35 times at different times and on different days of the week to see if a response can be achieved (the standard is eight times) and ‘soft refusals’ (where the respondent has not even listened to why the interviewer is calling) are recalled later to see if they can be persuaded to take part. The target number of interviews was 1,000 and all respondents were aged 16 or over and lived in England or Wales.

Interviewing and response rate

A pilot was conducted between 24 and 25 April 2006, and main fieldwork was conducted from 3 May to 13 July 2006. Interviews were conducted by GfK NOP’s telephone interviewing centre using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) software. All interviewers and supervisors were fully trained to the market research industry’s IQCS (Interview Quality Control Scheme) standards. Quality checks were carried out on a continuous basis via remote listening and onscreen verification for five to ten per cent of the interviews. All interviewers were briefed before starting interviewing.

In total, 5,306 telephone numbers were supplied to achieve the target of 1,000 interviews. When business numbers, numbers not in service, and duplicates were removed, the total was reduced to 3,209. Of these, a further 580 potential interviewees could not be contacted as they were busy or there was no answer. Of the remaining 2,953 calls, where a person was reached, 1,000 of these resulted in a successful interview. The response rate was therefore 33.9 per cent of contacts. In order to address possible response bias, data were weighted to reflect national population and household demographics using updated 2004 population estimates.

Data processing

Results were available in electronic form immediately after the interviews had finished. Following the completion of interviewing, data processing was undertaken to produce simple tabulations and a dataset for the Home Office. The results were coded, and the raw survey data underwent editing by the executive team. Extensive editing was not required as the CATI software included detailed filtering, range checks and logic checks. The complete, clean and weighted dataset was supplied to the Home Office in tabular format.

Appendix 3: Additional tables

Note that all tables are based on a telephone survey of 1,000 members of the public.

Table A1: Degree of 'organisation' in different crime types (%)*

	Very organised	Fairly organised	Not very organised	Not at all organised	Don't know
Drug dealing	82	12	2	1	3
Drug smuggling	80	13	2	2	4
People smuggling	73	16	5	2	5
Credit card fraud	63	26	5	2	4
Counterfeiting	63	23	6	3	6
ID theft	59	27	5	3	5
Gun crime	55	29	9	2	6
Prostitution	46	31	13	4	6
Car theft	30	36	23	7	4
Burglary	22	33	31	11	3
Street robbery	19	28	37	12	4
Vandalism	16	21	36	24	3

* where row totals do not sum to 100%, this is due to rounding.

Table A2: Most harmful organised crime type

	Per cent	Count
Drug dealing	30	304
Drug smuggling	26	264
Gun crime	10	95
People smuggling	9	90
Burglary	5	52
Street robbery	4	42
ID theft	3	33
Vandalism	2	23
Credit card fraud	2	22
Counterfeiting	1	8
Terrorism	1	7
Prostitution	1	6
Car theft	1	5
Murder	<1	4
All crime	<1	3
Others	1	14
Don't know	3	27
Total	100	1,000

Table A3: Most serious harms associated with organised crime

	Per cent	Count
Physical harm to the victims	25	254
Emotional harm to the victims	24	245
Negative impact on communities	10	98
Negative impact on young people	8	78
Impact on other public services such as the NHS	4	42
Financial harm to victims	4	40
Costs to the wider economy (taxes and revenue)	4	40
Concern and worry for members of the public	3	27
Costs to criminal justice system (policing and sentencing etc.)	2	21
Costs for businesses	<1	2
Cannot choose/equally important	15	153
Total	100	1,000

Table A4: Most serious harms associated with most serious organised crimes

	Per cent	Count
Physical harm to the victims	25	254
Emotional harm to the victims	24	245
Negative impact on communities	10	98
Negative impact on young people	8	78
Impact on other public services such as the NHS	4	42
Financial harm to victims	4	40
Costs to the wider economy (taxes and revenue)	4	40
Concern and worry for members of the public	3	27
Costs to criminal justice system (policing and sentencing etc.)	2	21
Costs for businesses	<1	2
Cannot choose/equally important	15	153
Total	100	1,000

Table A5: Harm caused to the country by crime types (%)*

	A lot of harm	A fair amount of harm	Not very much harm	No harm at all	Don't know
Drug dealing	81	13	4	1	2
Drug smuggling	68	22	6	1	4
Credit card fraud	63	29	5	1	2
Gun crime	62	24	11	1	2
Burglary	55	36	7	1	1
ID theft	55	29	9	2	5
Street robbery	54	33	10	1	2
Vandalism	51	36	11	1	2
People smuggling	51	30	13	2	6
Car theft	44	39	13	1	3
Counterfeiting	34	36	21	2	8
Prostitution	26	35	27	6	7

* where row totals do not sum to 100%, this is due to rounding

Table A6: Harm caused to the local community (%)*

	A lot of harm	A fair amount of harm	Not very much harm	No harm at all	Don't know
Drug dealing	34	30	21	9	7
Vandalism	29	37	27	5	2
Burglary	28	39	27	4	2
Car theft	24	34	31	7	4
Street robbery	22	26	36	12	5
Drug smuggling	21	18	30	17	14
Credit card fraud	20	29	27	12	12
Gun crime	14	13	38	30	6
ID theft	14	23	32	17	15
People smuggling	11	12	36	29	12
Counterfeiting	8	19	41	16	16
Prostitution	6	13	37	33	11

* where row totals do not sum to 100%, this is due to rounding

Table A7: Extent of individual worry caused by different crime types (%)*

	A lot of harm	A fair amount of harm	Not very much harm	No harm at all	Don't know
Drug dealing	47	28	12	13	1
Burglary	43	41	9	6	-
Credit card fraud	42	37	12	8	1
Gun crime	41	25	18	15	1
Drug smuggling	37	27	20	15	1
Street robbery	37	34	19	10	
ID theft	37	37	15	11	1
Vandalism	33	38	20	9	
Car theft	31	39	19	11	1
People smuggling	26	23	27	22	2
Counterfeiting	15	29	31	22	2
Prostitution	12	22	33	32	2

* where row totals do not sum to 100%, this is due to rounding

Table A8: Crime types that respondents are most worried about

	Per cent	Count
Burglary	44	436
Drug dealing	38	380
Street robbery	35	349
Gun crime	31	309
Car theft	24	238
ID theft	23	226
Vandalism	22	218
Credit card fraud	21	214
Drug smuggling	18	175
People smuggling	11	110
Prostitution	3	32
Counterfeiting	3	25
Equally worried	2	17
No answer	3	32
All crime	<1	3
Others	1	14
Don't know	3	27
Total	100	1,000

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