

## **Annex D: Covid 19: The experience of victims of crime – a rapid international review**

Justice Analytical Services

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## Main Points

- Most of the analysis available relates to the prevalence of victimisation over the lockdown period rather than the experiences of victims. Although robust figures are scarce at the moment, there is emerging international evidence that there has been surges and falls in certain types of crime which in turn indicates changes to the types of victimisation people may experience, certainly in the shorter term.
- Researchers agree that it is too early to say what impact Covid 19 has had on crime but there are consistent reports that 'street' crime has fallen considerably in all of the jurisdictions reviewed. However, there are widespread concerns about an increasing number of victims of domestic abuse, Covid-related fraud, hate crime, anti-social behaviour and cybercrime including revenge porn.
- The vast majority of on-line articles and commentary about victimisation during lockdown focus on domestic abuse.
- We only came across a few surveys asking victims about their experiences during lockdown. In terms of UK research, a March news article reported that the Victims Commissioner in England and Wales found that victims were losing faith in the justice system due to court delays and that senior police officers warned that they would have to prioritise violent offences if the pandemic worsened.
- In terms of domestic abuse, the available evidence on victim experience is limited but victims organisations in the UK and US have reported that victims feel trapped, need emotional support, feel neglected by services, have deteriorating mental health and fear for their children's safety. Experts say they are often afraid to seek help especially because they fear catching the virus and that health services are overloaded. Some US researchers have examined previous natural disasters and have predicted that the impact of Covid 19 on victims of domestic abuse could be even worse.
- There are also disturbing accounts of violent hate crime directed towards Chinese and Asian people, which is fuelled by the 'China virus' rhetoric and also that far-right groups are using the virus to create further division. There also some evidence from England that a disproportionate number of people of colour have been fined for breaches.
- There is evidence that thousands of people are falling victim to phishing scams, scammed into buying fake products such as face masks and non-existent pension schemes etc. There is some evidence that revenge porn has also increased since lockdown.
- Remote court cases using tele or video conferencing may reduce the time victims have to wait for their case to be heard and there are examples of good practice in civil cases. However, some concerns have been raised by legal practitioners about using video-conferencing for domestic abuse cases and with people with certain disabilities and those who do not have access to IT.
- What is less clear is how crime rates will be impacted again as lockdown is lifted and what impact an ailing economy and low employment will have on crime rates as we emerge from the Covid 19 crisis.
- There are a number of best practice examples from the EU on how to support victims of domestic abuse, cybercrime and hate crime which are described at the end of this paper.



## Contents

1.	<b>Section 1: Evidence on the experiences of victims during Covid 19</b> .....	4
2.	<b>Experiences of victims during COVID 19</b> .....	4
3.	<b>Domestic abuse</b> .....	5
4.	<b>Child contact issues for domestic abuse victims</b> .....	7
5.	<b>Domestic homicides</b> .....	7
6.	<b>Child abuse and neglect</b> .....	8
7.	<b>General Family violence</b> .....	8
8.	<b>Drug misuse</b> .....	8
9.	<b>Hate crime</b> .....	9
10.	<b>Cybercrime</b> .....	10
11.	<b>Neighbourhood disputes</b> .....	10
12.	<b>Victim confidence in the justice system</b> .....	11
13.	<b>Potential impact on victims of appearing in remote court cases</b> .....	12
14.	<b>Section 2: Evidence of crime rates during Covid 19</b> .....	13
15.	<b>Available evidence on crime rates</b> .....	13
16.	<b>England and Wales</b> .....	14
17.	<b>International picture – an overview</b> .....	15
18.	<b>Germany</b> .....	15
19.	<b>France</b> .....	16
20.	<b>Italy</b> .....	17
21.	<b>Spain</b> .....	17
22.	<b>United States</b> .....	18
23.	<b>Canada</b> .....	18
24.	<b>Section 3: Protection and support for victims of domestic violence, cybercrime and hate crime during COVID-19 pandemic</b> .....	19

The main purpose of this paper is to assess how Covid 19 might have impacted on crime and victimisation in other countries, so we can identify any useful learning. Therefore evidence from Scotland does not form the main part of this paper although some relevant information from Scotland is included.

## 1. Section 1: Evidence on the experiences of victims during Covid 19

With most surveys and face to face research on hold due to social distancing rules perhaps it is not surprising that there is currently a dearth of empirical evidence on victims experiences during lock down. We did however find some emerging insights into the impact of Covid 19 on victims, the vast majority of which focus on domestic abuse.

While there have also been reports of increases in fraud, cybercrime, anti-social behaviour and hate crime during lockdown, this review only found a few accounts from the victims perspective – most of the available evidence has been communicated to the press or by support services. As the evidence at this stage is extremely limited, this paper will also review international crime rates during the pandemic in order to predict possible changes in victimisation rates and experiences.

As researchers have stated, it is too early to fully understand the experience of victims of crime during Covid 19<sup>1</sup>, the following should be interpreted with caution.

## 2. Experiences of victims during COVID 19

As mentioned above robust intelligence on the experience of victims is scarce. One exception to the rule is New Zealand who have conducted a weekly telephone victimisation survey over the lockdown period. It found that New Zealanders are worrying much less about being a victim of crime than before lockdown and that issues raised by the public have been fairly consistent over the lockdown period, the most common problems being with noisy neighbours and dangerous driving. However, caution is needed interpreting this difference as the pre-pandemic data is based on 12 months experience rather than one week<sup>2</sup>.

Victim experience has mainly been reported in news stories or by victim support organisations. For example, Victim Support Scotland reported a 400% increase in the number of safeguarding reports where victims and witnesses supported by the charity have talked about suicidal thoughts. Victim Support Scotland has also raised concerns that the use of a smaller number of jurors could result in an increase in mistrials, due

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2665910720300384>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Publications/Pulse-survey-report-004-20200513-v2.0-fin.pdf>

to illness or a juror having to self-isolate causing further delays which would be distressing for victims<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, the domestic abuse support organisation Safe Lives have provided a rare and useful insight into the experience of a small number of domestic abuse victims who are in lockdown. Their survey results are discussed below.

### 3. Domestic abuse

There is some evidence emerging internationally that domestic abuse incidents have increased - in China, domestic violence is reported to have tripled during lockdown. Additionally, France has indicated a 30 % increase in domestic violence reports, Brazil estimates domestic violence reports have jumped 40–50 %, and Italy has also indicated reports of domestic violence are on the rise. It is unclear at this stage whether these reported rises are due to increased reporting and /or whether there is a real increase. <sup>4</sup>

Given that this is an unprecedented crisis and evidence is scarce at this time, some experts have highlighted risks associated with lockdown by reviewing what happened during natural disasters and previous pandemics, where rapidly increasing stress, sudden shifts in daily routines, the closing of schools and community resources, being unable to leave the house for a period of time and a rapid decrease in available resources have some parallels with the current situation.

Controlling behaviours, unemployment, and limited access to social support systems have all been identified as risk factors that also commonly occur after natural disasters. In the US domestic abuse reports increased by 46 % in Othello, Washington after the eruption of Mount St. Helens, along with increases in reported alcohol abuse, family stress, and aggression. After Hurricane Katrina, reports of psychological abuse among women by their partner increased 35 % while reports of partner physical abuse nearly doubled in the southernmost Mississippi counties. Similar significant increases in domestic abuse have been reported following earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and many other catastrophic events.

Some researchers suggest that the impact of the current Coronavirus crisis may be even worse in increasing incidences of domestic abuse due to closures of key organisations for longer durations than often occur in the aftermath of natural disasters.

In addition, although community togetherness is often encouraged after natural disasters, the physical separation from communities will make this difficult. As a result, researchers speculate that the increase in domestic abuse reports during and after the Covid-19 pandemic may be *even greater* than the substantial increase observed in reports following natural disasters and other catastrophic events.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://victimsupport.scot/about-us/news-list/victim-support-scotland-highlights-concerns-about-mental-health-of-victims-during-covid-19-pandemic/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7152912/>

Studies also suggest that any increased in domestic abuse incidents reported after a natural disaster may extend for several months after the catastrophic event occurs. A study looking at the aftermath of natural disasters in the US and Canada found domestic violence victim service requests increased for an entire year following the event.<sup>5</sup>

Safe Lives, an organisation which supports domestic abuse victims in the UK have a survey on their website which has gained an insight into what some victims of domestic abuse in England and Wales are experiencing during lockdown. The survey was launched in March 2020 and over a month there have been 107 responses. Just to note that these responses may or may not be representative of victims experiences as a whole and is unclear if the issues raised are different from a pre-lockdown baseline.

Key findings are:

- The most common response to concerns around safety, with a third of the total responses (33%), was a fear of the perpetrator.
- 12% of respondents who were concerned about their own safety said they couldn't escape or were in isolation, 8% had concerns around finances, 7% feared for the safety of their children, and 4% had concerns around their mental health.
- 8% of respondents who were concerned about their own safety felt that the courts or police were not responding quickly enough. Both criminal and civil courts and protective orders have been cited as a concern alongside the police not responding to incidents of domestic abuse.
- Although only a small number of respondents cited stalking and harassment as an issue, this category has been a more recent theme and has been particularly highlighted in the last two weeks of the survey.
- There has been an increase in comments from survivors who want more emotional support from specialist services – either more frequently or face-to-face but socially distanced.
- When responding to a question about what would increase their safety, (31%) felt that the way to increase their safety was to be away from the perpetrator. This included those who lived with the perpetrator and wanted to leave or wanted the perpetrator to leave, as well as those who were living away from the perpetrator but feared that the perpetrator knew where they lived, that they would see the perpetrator in the area or that the perpetrator could contact them at any time<sup>6</sup>.

An article which appeared in Time Magazine in March 2020 provides an insight into the experience of domestic abuse victims in the US who are trapped inside with their

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7152912/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe%20at%20Home%20survivor%20survey%20results%200.pdf>

perpetrators. As medical facilities around the world scramble to respond to the coronavirus, health systems are becoming overloaded, seeking help has more difficult for victims, especially when it came to accessing medical care or therapists. For many women, even the fear of contracting the coronavirus was stopping them from seeking out medical care after experiencing physical abuse. Many victims said they also felt that they can no longer seek refuge at their parents' home, for fear that they could expose their elderly parents to the virus. For some, travel restrictions were limiting their ability to stay with loved ones<sup>7</sup>.

#### **4. Child contact issues for domestic abuse victims**

Justice Analysts have recently explored the issue of child contact during the lockdown which identified a few concerns for domestic abuse victims. For example, parents are being advised to stick to court orders where in force, and existing contact arrangements if no court order in force. However there is an immediate issue for domestic abuse victims in that often contact will be in a contact centre or out of the home – either supervised or unsupervised, contact centres are still not offering face to face contact during the Covid 19 crisis.

Also if parents need to vary contact arrangements due to current crisis, then across jurisdictions the advice is that first step is to try and come to arrangements amicably. However this could pose immediate issues for domestic abuse victims who might not want to/absolutely shouldn't enter into contact with abusive ex partners.

Organisations across jurisdictions are reporting that abusive partners who now can't see their children may be trying to coerce partners for new contact arrangements that may be unsafe. There is evidence across jurisdictions that abusive parents are using Covid 19 as an excuse to undertake unilateral variation and to not hand children back to the other parent, using Covid guidance, e.g. saying other parent not abiding by national Covid guidance, or is at a heightened risk of Covid.

Advice in most jurisdictions is if arrangements can't be agreed amicably then they can approach the courts – most jurisdictions will hear under priority criteria, especially if there is domestic abuse.

Some lawyers related the concerns of women who are contacting them worried about abusive partners being let out of prison under Covid release, and asking how they could get injunctions out to protect themselves and their children. This may explain why injunctions have been seen as urgent business in some jurisdictions including England and Wales.

#### **5. Domestic homicides**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, reports have emerged of an apparent increase in domestic homicides in a number of affected countries. In March 2020, Spain (a country that has been particularly hard hit by the pandemic) saw its first domestic violence

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<sup>7</sup> <https://time.com/5803887/coronavirus-domestic-violence-victims/>

fatality just 5 days following lockdown; a woman was murdered by her husband in front of their children in Valencia. There is also emerging evidence of an increased number of domestic homicides in the UK since the lockdown restrictions were enacted (Ingala Smith, 2020). At this early stage of the pandemic, it is too early to verify whether the increased reporting of these deaths represents an actual rise in domestic homicide rates or increased media attention.

However, experts are keen to impress that what we are seeing is more attention on existing issue, rather than a new phenomenon. Many news reports imply that domestic abuse and domestic abuse homicides are only related to coronavirus and will dissipate after lockdown when, in reality, domestic violence and abuse existed before Covid-19 and will be there after it<sup>8</sup>.

## 6. Child abuse and neglect

In contrast to increasing reports of domestic violence, US researchers have noted that many child welfare organisations are noting a significant drop in reports of child abuse or neglect<sup>9</sup> but this decrease may be a result of fewer opportunities for detection as opposed to an actual decrease in incidence. They also state that closures of schools and other critical community organisations has limited key community partners in their ability to detect and report abuse and an overwhelming number of reports of child abuse or neglect may children do return to schools.

## 7. General Family violence

With lockdown requiring ‘shelter in place measures’ and with organisations closed for an extended period risk factors for family violence such as unemployment, reduced income, limited resources, and limited social support are likely to be further compounded. In addition, alcohol abuse, a risk factor for family violence, has been linked to an accumulation of stressful events and a lack of social support (both likely occurring as a result of Covid-19). Some US researchers have suggested that as bars and restaurants are closed, family violence perpetrators who abuse alcohol may be even more likely to do so *in the home*, likely increasing risk for the entire household.<sup>10</sup>

## 8. Drug misuse

Understanding the health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on people who use drugs in Scotland is the focus of a new University of Stirling study (funded by the Scottish Government) . The research will consider whether a reduction in the availability of illicit drugs has changed purchasing habits – resulting in an increased risk for some – and look at how others may have reduced or ceased drug use to avoid social contact. The study will also consider whether changes to drug service provision, introduced due to

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<sup>8</sup> <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-murders-media-narrative-about-domestic-abuse-during-lockdown-is-wrong-and-harmful-137011>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2665910720300384>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2665910720300384>



Covid-19, exposes people who use drugs to harm through a heightened risk of overdose or relapse. Feedback received by the Drug Deaths Taskforce suggests a number of issues are beginning to emerge for people who use drugs because of the virus and the measures being used to combat it.<sup>11</sup>

## 9. Hate crime

Police figures in England and Wales show that hate crimes against Asian and Chinese people have soared during the coronavirus outbreak, increasing by 21%. 267 offences were recorded in the first three months of 2020 during the Covid 19 crisis - including assaults, robberies, harassment and criminal damage. Victims describe being punched, spat at and coughed on in the street, as well as being verbally abused about coronavirus after the first case was reported in China.

The virus has also been used by extremists to spread hatred and division. There have been posts on notoriously extremist-friendly platforms like Telegram, 4chan and Gab linking the coronavirus to racist and anti-semitic slurs and memes. The A.D.L said “Users across these channels regularly share racist messages or caricatures of Chinese people, mocking their eating habits, accents, and hygiene.” Some posts, they went on, “appear to be cheering on the virus, hoping it will spread to predominately non-white countries, such as those in Africa.” Oren Segal, the vice-president of the A.D.L.’s Center on Extremism, noted that extremists “use every opportunity they can to create division<sup>12</sup>.

An article published by the Institute of Race Relations in England noted that;

“Racist incidents/crimes are underreported and my fear is that during the period of Covid-19 and lockdown this will continue and actually worsen. Inevitably this will mean victims of racial harassment will be less likely to report it. The charging and conviction rates for racist crimes are already woefully low. With courts not sitting and police resources directed elsewhere, victims of racism will again be ignored and in many cases, justice not even sought in the first instance<sup>13</sup>.”

There is also UK evidence that people of colour are disproportionately likely to be fined by police. Between 27 March and 11 May, English police forces handed out 13,445 Fixed Penalty Notices. Exclusive data analysis by Liberty Investigates and the Guardian has found out that people of colour were 54% more likely to be fined than white people. The finding comes amid greater confusion around the changes to lockdown rules and new police powers to fine first-time offenders £100 and up to £3,200 for repeat offences.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=Impact+of+the+covid+19+pandemic+on+drug+users&ie=UTF-8&oe=>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-the-uk/the-rise-of-coronavirus-hate-crimes>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/race-hate-crimes-collateral-damage-of-covid-19/>

Shiner and Liberty Investigates produced calculations that suggest as many as 2,957 fines may have gone to people of colour, a 90% increase on the 1,557 that would have been proportionate to population size

## 10. Cybercrime

Actionfraud have reported that fraud victims have lost more than £4.6m to coronavirus-related scams during the lockdown. More than 2,000 victims lost cash through fake online goods sales, bogus cold-calls, non-existent pension plans and other frauds<sup>14</sup>.

Another 11,206 people claim to have been victims of email (phishing) and text (smishing) attempts to trick them into giving out personal details.

Since the lockdown police forces have warned about many scams cashing in on the coronavirus pandemic, including the sale of fake or non-existent face masks, virus cures and treatments and testing kits.

Others people have fallen victim to a pet scam, where bogus breeders collect deposits from customers who have not been allowed to travel to view the puppies and kittens they think they are buying. Other people have fallen victim to fraudsters offering bogus cheap loans, promising to fast track applications in return for an upfront fee.

In the past month, Actionfraud reported that 260 victims have reported receiving emails offering discounts on the TV licensing fee.

There has also been a concerning increasing trend in revenge porn and sexploitation since the lockdown. The number of visits to the website of the Revenge Porn Helpline, the government-funded service for adults who have fallen victim to the crime, doubled in the week beginning 23 March. The rise is thought to be driven by the increased use of the internet and social media during the lockdown<sup>15</sup>.

## 11. Neighbourhood disputes

There is emerging international evidence that the pandemic has escalated tensions between neighbours and excessive reporting is putting pressure on police resources which would likely impact on the police's ability to respond to more serious offences.

It was reported in the UK press that police chiefs have urged the public to stop exploiting the coronavirus pandemic to settle vendettas, after police forces reported

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<sup>14</sup> <https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-fraud-victims-have-lost-more-than-4-6m-to-virus-related-scams-11996721>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/13/anti-asian-hate-crimes-up-21-in-uk-during-coronavirus-crisis>

that many people have been “lockdown shaming” as part of ongoing domestic disputes.

Police forces have been inundated with thousands of daily allegations of people breaching coronavirus restrictions, the police’s professional standards body has intervened to ask the public to curb “deliberate false reporting” and spreading misinformation to punish nuisance neighbours or settle long-running feuds.

National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) urged the public to “exercise common sense and only report well-meaning concerns” as it was impacted on already stretched police resources.

“Deliberate false reporting, obstruction or misinformation at a time of crisis helps nobody, and risks public safety. In those cases police will use their discretion in determining whether enforcement action is appropriate”<sup>16</sup>.

## 12. Victim confidence in the justice system

There are a number of experts who speculate that victims are likely to feel the impact of an overstretched police force, changes to charging, and the closing down of courts. New jury trials have been postponed to stem the spread of the pandemic. Reduced access to justice and a growing backlog of cases is making it even harder for the courts to serve victims and accused, with delays potentially prolonging their trauma and increasing attrition rates, with implications for the legitimacy of the justice system. Victims of crime may lose further confidence in the criminal justice system as a result of Covid 19<sup>17</sup>.

A news article in The Independent (March 2020) reported that research by the Victims Commissioner in England and Wales found that victims are losing confidence in the criminal justice system as Covid 19 delays cases<sup>18</sup>. The report also states that analysis of data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales found that more than a third of victims were dissatisfied with how police handled their complaint, and 36 per cent were unhappy with the wider criminal justice system — up from 30 per cent four years before. More than half of victims said police did not keep them well-informed about progress with their case. One in five victims did not report their crime in part because they did not think the police would have investigated it. However it is unclear from the article and from ONS survey results whether the time period under study related specifically to coronavirus period.

Dame Vera Baird QC, the victims' commissioner for England and Wales, is reported to have said the poor experiences recorded will “diminish the number of people willing

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/18/police-call-for-end-to-lockdown-shaming-as-a-weapon-in-feuds>

<sup>17</sup> <https://gateone.co.uk/how-covid-19-is-creating-a-victims-crisis/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/uk-criminal-justice-system-victim-trial-court-coronavirus-delay-a9422066.html>

to help the police and support cases to court” and “There is concern about police inaction and the expectation of victims that police will not be interested their crime.”

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) says police have been referring fewer cases for consideration, while police leaders have cited the impact of budget cuts<sup>19</sup>.

The article reports that senior officers in England and Wales warned that a “graduated withdrawal of service” will be enacted if the pandemic worsens, causing the loss of officers and increased demand from the NHS. Emergency response, threats to life and serious crimes will be prioritised, sparking a warning that gang and drug-related violence could increase.

Scottish Government funded Justice Journeys research with victim-survivors of rape and sexual assault highlighted the distressing impact of delays and uncertainty on their wellbeing and ability to recover from the abuse that they had endured<sup>20</sup>.

### 13. Potential impact on victims of appearing in remote court cases

Given the limited time we had to conduct this review, we have not been able to explore whether there is any evidence on the experiences of victims who have been involved in remote court cases during the pandemic or the views of those whose cases have been delayed. There is some evidence from a previous paper by Justice Analytical Services on the civil courts, and accounts by legal professionals that have found that video conferencing has helped to reduce the backlog and there are examples of good practice. However, they have also raised concerns for individuals involved in domestic abuse cases, parties with cognitive impairment or when an intermediary or interpreter is required. Concerns were raised about access to appropriate technology (for parties and professionals), the lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities in terms of setting up and supporting the administration of hearings, the extent of professionals’ technological capabilities, and the limited IT support and training.

In addition, a recent rapid evidence review<sup>21</sup> on what we know about the impact of remote hearings on access to justice has found:

- Parties do not fully appreciate the seriousness or finality of proceedings when conducted remotely and therefore do not avail themselves of the procedural safeguards available to them— including legal advice. (immigration proceedings)
- Partly-video hearings impair a defendant’s ability to communicate with their legal representatives when they are finding proceedings difficult to follow. Includes criminal justice context

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<sup>20</sup> <https://sccjrblog.wordpress.com/2020/05/12/gender-based-violence-in-a-pandemic/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/remote-hearings-rapid-review.pdf>

- Technical issues with technology can make it more difficult for parties to follow proceedings
- Partly video hearings may impact negatively on perceptions of party and witness credibility.
- The use of remote hearings makes it more difficult for the court to identify vulnerability and put in place reasonable adjustments to ensure effective participation.

It is unclear how many criminal cases have used remote hearings, but these issues are likely to be transferable to criminal cases should they be heard using video-conferencing.

## **14. Section 2: Evidence of crime rates during Covid 19**

This section focuses on how Covid 19 may have impacted on crime rates in other jurisdictions. As mentioned in the previous section, we are yet to understand the full impact of Covid 19 on crime and victimisation or the personal experience of victims. In terms of the impact of lockdown on victimisation in Scotland, the suspension of the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey fieldwork has left a gap in our understanding of victims experience of crime during the lockdown period. Although recorded crime data and accounts from experts can only partially fill this temporary vacancy, it may provide us with an indication of how crime and hence victimisation patterns have changed since lockdown began.

Researchers have cautioned on the reality of what is happening behind official figures. Research evidence about the impact of COVID-19 is in its infancy and there is little disaggregated data to inform our understanding of how different groups within society are impacted (e.g. children and young people or those with disabilities). Much of the information currently available is therefore drawn from police and agency reports. Factors such as varying legal definitions of domestic abuse and sexual violence, other underlying trends in data, heightened publicity during the crisis, and well documented challenges in reporting even out with pandemic conditions, mean that drawing comparisons and conclusions is problematic<sup>22</sup>.

That said, there is some indication from other countries that general crime and victimisation patterns have shifted over the lockdown period. The evidence below does suggest the criminal justice system may benefit from gathering intelligence in order to plan and prepare.

## **15. Available evidence on crime rates**

Most countries lag behind the UK and US in terms of compiling and releasing crime data (Italy is an exception). Therefore this paper includes a mix of official data,

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<sup>22</sup> <https://sccirblog.wordpress.com/2020/05/12/gender-based-violence-in-a-pandemic/>

anecdotal evidence and other evidence from established criminologists in the country concerned, to give an impression of the current situation.

Most information has been informed by official government and policing websites, the news media and from a recent unpublished international paper written by Dr Ben Bradford. We have not been able to provide an extensive international overview in the timeframe, but instead we have selected a few examples where crime information was in the public domain.

The countries reviewed are Scotland, England and Wales, Germany, France, Italy, Spain the US and Canada.

## **16. England and Wales**

Provisional figures show that police recorded crime from all 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales has fallen overall by 25 per cent during the lockdown period. However this excludes fraud data which is recorded centrally by Action Fraud – in the four weeks to May 10, compared to the same period in 2019.

Across the country, falls were recorded for residential burglary, vehicle crime (including theft of and from a vehicle), assaults (including both Grievous Bodily Harm and Actual Bodily Harm) and robbery committed against individuals, rape and shoplifting. Forces have also observed decreases in call volumes to 999 and 101, and have also seen falls in the number of cases brought to police relating to mental health and missing persons.

However they have reported a four per cent rise in domestic abuse incidents. They do warn that not all incidents will result in a crime being identified and recorded, nor will hidden abuse be captured in these data.

Assaults on emergency service workers saw a 14 per cent rise. This is a snapshot of an offence type which is typically recorded in low volumes so data may therefore fluctuate between snapshots. The 14 per cent rise is largely due to increases in assaults without injury, which may be driven by scenarios such as common assault on staff.<sup>23</sup>

Some experts are warning that there may be significant increase in certain crime types when lockdown is eased. For example Professor Simon Harding, Director of the National Centre for Gang Research (NCGR) in England has predicted a rising tide of gang violence which could hit UK towns and cities once Covid-19 restrictions lift as rivalries and tension built up during lockdown erupts following weeks of isolation fuelled social media fallouts and rival gang tensions, however it is unclear if the same concerns exist in Scotland.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.npcc.police.uk/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.uwl.ac.uk/research/research-centres/national-centre-gang-research>

Police also revealed that drug supply might be falling, with criminals posing as key workers to deal and targeting long supermarket queues to sell drugs.<sup>25</sup>

In London, there has been a 36% reduction in Total Notifiable Offences during April 2020 when compared to April 2019 with reductions within almost every crime category except drug offences (up 27%) and domestic abuse (up 3%). However, there has been a huge rise of 174% for calls reporting anti-social behaviour.

## 17. International picture – an overview.

In terms of the picture outside the UK, there is emerging evidence that while overall crime has fallen over lockdown specific types of crimes may have increased. There are also concerns that once lockdown is lifted countries may see surge in some types of offence and an sudden increase in reports to the police.

Building upon information provided by EU Member States and in-house expertise, Europol found that offenders were using lockdown measures to commit cybercrime, fraud, sell counterfeit and substandard goods and also commit organised property crime (for example impersonation scams)<sup>26</sup>. The Fundamental Rights Agency reports an increase in most EU Member States in incidents of racism, xenophobia and intolerance targeted at certain national or ethnic communities, which are linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is less clear, however, is how crime rates may change again as lockdown measures are loosened, or how the impact of Covid 19 on the economy may impact on crime rates.

## 18. Germany

Germany has not yet released official data related to the impact of the pandemic on crime rates but street crime appears to have decreased significantly, and drug enforcement units have had few if any operations in recent weeks because the amount of drugs entering the country illegally has been reduced as a result of increased border controls.<sup>27</sup> Organised crime groups appear less active; police reports indicate that many members of the 'Ndranghetta (Italian mafia) have left the country for Italy.

However there is evidence that covid-related crime has increased. The financial intelligence unit (FIU) observed that the pandemic is enabling offenders to exploit public anxiety and companies for fraudulent purposes, from selling fake face masks and other medical devices to fictitious calls for donations to fake relief actions and credit applications to banks with documentation or proof of funds for immediate financial assistance as evidence of liquidity.<sup>28</sup> The Federal Criminal Police Office

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/apr/15/in-uk-falls-sharply-since-start-of-coronavirus-lockdown>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.europol.europa.eu/staying-safe-during-covid-19-what-you-need-to-know>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.tagesschau.de/investigativ/ndr/organisierte-kriminalitaet-corona-101.html>

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.zoll.de/DE/Fachthemen/Zoelle/Coronakrise/FIU/fiu\\_node.html](https://www.zoll.de/DE/Fachthemen/Zoelle/Coronakrise/FIU/fiu_node.html)

warns that fake medicine is increasingly being sold online.<sup>29</sup> The FIU has also issued a warning that small restaurants and businesses could be bought during the crisis and turned into money laundering operations.

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Germany has also seen large-scale fraud in relation to financial relief effort surrounding the lock down, leading Germany's biggest state to the close down the aid programme for small businesses and the self-employed.<sup>30</sup> Several fake websites, looking exactly like government websites, had been set up to record the personal information of those eligible to claim the aid. The stolen information were then used to claim the funds on their behalf.

Police continue large scale raids against organised crime groups despite the current pandemic.<sup>31</sup> While there are no exact numbers, estimates suggest about four raids per week against criminal clans in the Ruhr-area. In addition, police conducted a nationwide operation targeting right-wing extremists (so called 'Reichsbürger') in March which found wide-spread media attention.<sup>32</sup>

## 19. France

Crime statistics have not been released but anecdotal evidence suggests that the nature of drug trafficking has changed in France - the open drug market slowdown is accompanied by an increase in home delivery. The number of people breaking into pharmacies has increased but also in Parisian house/flats where many people have left to spend the period of confinement elsewhere; and the level of domestic violence seems to have increased (the Ministry of Interior has set up a new alert system). There is evidence of counterfeiting remedies (fake pills), facial masks, and in some case heavy medical equipment There was also a recent Europol operation that resulted in the seizure of £13 million in counterfeit or illicit drugs and medical equipment<sup>33</sup>.

One official announcement came from the Interior Minister on 26<sup>th</sup> March, who reported an increase of over 30 per cent in police 'interventions' related to domestic violence (compared with 'the reference week', presumably the same week the previous year).

Experts suggest that police are using their powers to check authorisations to be on the street to address drug dealing hotspots, and that this is a major focus of attention. There have also been reports of higher levels of police violence in the poorer parts of the cities: there have been more checks by police in the Seine Saint Denis department (on outskirts of Paris) than anywhere else in France<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup>[https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Kurzmeldungen/DE/Warnhinweise/200403\\_CoronaMedikamente.html;jsessionid=583B3D86F140E88A51DC4B6000179033.live0611](https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Kurzmeldungen/DE/Warnhinweise/200403_CoronaMedikamente.html;jsessionid=583B3D86F140E88A51DC4B6000179033.live0611)

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/corona-betrug-103.html>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.hellwegeranzeiger.de/nachrichten/trotz-corona-weiter-razzien-gegen-essener-clan-kriminalitaet-1510030.html>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.welt.de/regionales/hamburg/article206649215/Reichsbuerger-Gruppe-verbotten-Durchsuchungen-auch-im-Norden.html>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.zdnet.com/article/europol-takes-down-coronavirus-fake-medicine-surgical-mask-criminal-gangs/>

<sup>34</sup> Changes in crime and policing resulting from Covid-19 'lockdowns': First takes from nine countries



## 20. Italy

Crime in Italy seems have fallen following the lockdown. Data for the period 1-22 March 2020 shows the total number of crimes recorded are 52,596, compared with 146,762 the previous year.<sup>35</sup> There is a general sense that the overall reduction is 'real' (i.e. not an artefact of reporting), but the pattern for individual crime types will inevitably be less certain. For specific crime types, the Ministry reports:

- Prostitution: - 77%
- Sexual offences: -69%
- Thefts: -67%
- Burglaries: -73%
- Robberies against post offices: -74%
- Robberies: -54%
- Drugs: -46%
- Domestic abuse: -44%
- Thefts in pharmacies: -14%
- Robberies in pharmacies: - 25%
- Cyber fraud -64%<sup>36</sup>

There is also a view that organised crime groups have been disrupted, both because transporting drugs has become more difficult, and because their organisations will be affected by cash flow problems in the same way as conventional businesses. However, diversification to other areas, such as loan sharking, is a possibility.<sup>37</sup>

One factor behind the reduction in crime may be increased guardianship by police in many parts of the country as Italian police carried out intensive checks of individuals and properties to ensure compliance with the lockdown.

## 21. Spain

Press reports suggest a 50% reduction in crime, attributed to the lockdown and the presence of the army in the streets.<sup>38</sup> There are however concerns about internet fraud and other online offending, including hackers attacking hospitals; and domestic

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<sup>35</sup> <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/notizie/emergenza-coronavirus-ridotti-spostamenti-netto-calo-i-reati>

<sup>36</sup> Changes in crime and policing resulting from Covid-19 'lockdowns': First takes from nine countries

Ben Bradford, Institute for Global City Policing

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.occrp.org/en/blog/11905-cocaine-corona-how-the-pandemic-is-squeezing-italian-crime-groups>

<sup>38</sup> <https://elpais.com/espana/2020-03-20/el-confinamiento-por-el-coronavirus-hace-caer-la-delincuencia-un-50.html>

violence – a helpline in Catalonia reported a 20% increase in calls over the first few days of the confinement period.<sup>39</sup>

The level of enforcement activity related to the restrictions currently in place is also high, and police seem to have been very prepared to sanction those found to be in breach. Official data suggest that as of 25<sup>th</sup> March there had been 1,268 arrests for breaches, and 144,555 proposals for administrative sanctions. By the 8<sup>th</sup> April this had increased to 3,267 arrests and 377,680 proposals for sanctions (the amount of which can range from 100 to 3,001 Euros).<sup>40</sup> Police in many cities have engaged in intensive traffic stop activity (for example to stop people commuting to second homes)<sup>41</sup>.

## 22. United States

In line with other jurisdictions, the US have seen an a significant dip in major crimes like burglary, assault, murder, robbery and grand larceny, a drop likely influenced by a lack of opportunity as businesses close and streets empty. For example, In Chicago, drug arrests have dropped by 42% in the weeks since the lockdown and in Los Angeles, the rate of key crimes plummeted 30% after March 15.

In some places outside the US , violence has gone down. Police in South Africa say that, comparing this time period to last year, the number of murders has dropped from 326 to 94.

However, while drug crimes and homicides are plummeting, the rate of domestic violence, which may be exacerbated by shelter-in-place orders, shows signs of increasing. Hate crime seems also to be a concern, in terms of targeted attacks against people of Chinese origin or descent but also in relation to White supremacist groups taking advantage of the situation for propaganda purposes and perhaps also as a trigger for action.<sup>42</sup> In Australia, too there are signs of a recent surge in racist incidents against Asian Australians and international students which appear to be triggered by racist assumptions that people from China or those who look ‘Asian’ are to blame for the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>43</sup>

## 23. Canada

Experts say it’s too soon to get a picture of how the pandemic may be affecting crime rates in Canada, but a recent news article drew together informal reports from police forces across the country.<sup>44</sup> The conclusion was police were seeing “fewer traffic

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/mar/28/lockdowns-world-rise-domestic-violence>

<sup>40</sup> <http://lector.kioskoymas.com/epaper/viewer.aspx?noredirect=true&bookmarkid=57J217MZYZQ>

<sup>41</sup> Changes in crime and policing resulting from Covid-19 ‘lockdowns’: First takes from nine countries  
Ben Bradford, Institute for Global City Policing

<sup>42</sup> <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-white-supremacists-and-the-weaponization-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19>


<sup>43</sup> <https://www.sydney.edu.au/law/news-and-events/news/2020/05/07/covid-19-and-hate-crime-in-australia.html>

<sup>44</sup> <https://nationalpost.com/news/crime-in-a-time-of-covid-19-how-the-pandemic-is-changing-criminality-in-our-neighbourhoods>

violations, less drunk driving, fewer frauds but way more domestic violence, commercial break-ins and stunt-driving”. Overall crime reported to York police, for example, was 13 per cent lower in March compared with the same month a year ago. However commercial break ins were up 45 per cent, and theft of vehicles up 44 per cent. In Toronto, by contrast, crimes against people and property were almost all down, a notable exception being homicide. Other cities reported increases in domestic complaints (a category ranging from calls over verbal arguments to serious assaults).<sup>45</sup>

## 24. Section 3: Protection and support for victims of domestic violence, cybercrime and hate crime during COVID-19 pandemic

The Directorate-General Justice and Consumers in the European Commission have also issued a short paper describing ways to protect and support to victims of crime during COVID-19 pandemic.

The full paper with references can be accessed here . The European Network on Victims’ Rights has also prepared a selection of good practices examples on how to deal with victims of domestic violence, cybercrime and hate crime, in co-operation with National Experts: It includes a wide variety of approaches similar to those in the Paper above, and includes protective measures for victims at courts as well as wider societal measures<sup>46</sup>.



Some good practice examples are;

### Domestic abuse

- Information campaigns to advertise alert mechanism for women to seek help in pharmacies (France and Spain)
- Policing services reaching out to former victims to ensure their well-being (Ireland)
- A survival kit on how to avoid domestic abuse (Germany)
- Allowing women to leave their homes to seek help without sanction (Italy)
- Declare support for women an essential service (Spain)

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<sup>45</sup> Changes in crime and policing resulting from Covid-19 ‘lockdowns’: First takes from nine countries  
Ben Bradford, Institute for Global City Policing

<sup>46</sup> [https://e-justice.europa.eu/content\\_impact\\_of\\_the\\_covid19\\_virus\\_on\\_the\\_justice\\_field-37147-en.do](https://e-justice.europa.eu/content_impact_of_the_covid19_virus_on_the_justice_field-37147-en.do)

- Establish a “social protection umbrella” for the women's shelter and women's counselling infrastructure, including financial protection for service providers (Germany)
- Increase funding - financial support is provided for women and girls affected by violence in times of crisis (Austria) . In France, one million euros was directed to domestic violence support services.
- E-mail service/web-chat service/helpline for victims of domestic violence (Portugal)
- 24-Hour Helplines in different languages (Germany and Austria)
- Special mobile applications to enable quick access to the police (Italy)
- In several Member States, governments subsidize hotel rooms where victims can quarantine in safety.
  - New space for emergency shelters (Spain)
  - Authorities encouraged to find pragmatic solutions for COVID-19-related shortages in shelters, such as short-term renting of hotels and holiday apartments (Germany)
- Continue prosecutions and continue to issue barring and protection orders, and keeping offenders in detention.

The UN Secretary-General explores how women and girls' lives are changing in the face of COVID-19, and outlines suggested priority measures to accompany both the immediate response and longer-term recovery efforts.

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>

They say that every COVID-19 response plan, and every recovery package and budgeting of resources, needs to address the gender impacts of this pandemic. This means: (1) including women and women's organisations at the heart of the COVID-19 response; (2) transforming the inequities of unpaid care work into a new, inclusive care economy that works for everyone; and (3) designing socio-economic plans with an intentional focus on the lives and futures of women and girls.

## **Cyber Crime**

- EUROPOL has prepared prevention and awareness tips to help the general public stay cyber safe<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.europol.europa.eu/staying-safe-during-covid-19-what-you-need-to-know>

## Hate Crime

- Fostering reporting of hate crime, improving accurate investigation of bias motivations and providing support to these victims, is advised.
- The national equality body Unia has produced a document for victims of potential hate crime or discrimination, related to the COVID-19 crisis. This information sheet provides some very targeted information to victims about the existing legislation, which steps they can take in a particular situation and if certain behaviour is not according to the existing legislation etc.
- Several local police zones, reinforced community policing, and maintained very close ties with different communities:
- By being very active and present on a daily basis, the local police zone of Antwerp wants to keep the threshold for victims of hate crimes (or other incidents) as small as possible. They have established many proactive measures in order to prevent certain incidents, and they assured they could react very quickly in case of incidents. The local police zone of Antwerp developed inter alia the following initiatives:
  - Faith communities: places of worship and other locations are regularly visited to maintain dialogue.
  - Police works closely together with other colleagues (INTEL and public order) to assure a good internal flow of information and to be able to respond quickly to specific trends.
  - LGBTI+ community: police reach out to these communities via civil society ("The Pink House in Antwerp"), and they assure their electronic presence via video-call or e-mail.
  - Black-African community: police reached out to this community at the beginning of the crisis. They reported no incidents, but maintain close ties with them.
- The local police zone of Charleroi organises regular visits to the representatives of the Mosque in Charleroi, in order to maintain dialogue. Also, in every shift in each district there is the presence of a police officer who is familiar with handling hate crime cases, in order to maintain specific attention to this issue.