



Home Office

**To: Home Secretary
Minister of State for Crime and Policing
Minister for Safeguarding
Minister for Security
Permanent Secretary**

From: Irrelevant &
Efficiency and Resources
Unit, Irrelevant & Sensitive
SCS: Andrew Johnson
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Information to note

Crime demand impact – COVID 19

This note summarises the initial thinking on potential changes in crime trends as a result of Covid 19.

Crime Trends

1. HOAI have provided an initial assessment of how crime patterns might change as a result of Covid 19 (see full grid at ANNEX A), applying the six drivers of crime framework (see ANNEX B). Even in normal circumstances, predicting future crime trends is challenging as it is influenced by a very wide range of factors and interactions. In this context, there are additional uncertainties. The assessment should be treated as a plausible scenario, based on what we know about the drivers of crime, combined with our assumptions about the impact of coronavirus on daily life. Our conclusions are similar to those drawn in other assessments of crime trends during this period, including, the recently published Policy Exchange report 'Policing in a Pandemic' and the NCA Threat Assessment.
2. Broadly, we expect that traditionally 'hidden' crimes that take place in the home could increase, while crimes occurring in public spaces, such as robbery, may decline. An increase in working from home could reduce opportunities for burglaries and vehicle thefts. Closing schools for a considerable period may result in an unoccupied younger cohort contributing to some offence types, including public order/criminal damage, the sharing of self-generated indecent imagery and revenge pornography.
3. It is plausible that we may see an increase in economic crime, including computer misuse and fraud, especially with an increasing reliance on online purchases and scammers taking advantage of the vulnerable. These crimes tend to be subject to lengthy court hearings and often require specialist prosecutors and judges.
4. It is difficult to predict the impact that Covid 19 will have on high harm crime. Whilst we anticipate a decrease in violent offences, we may see an increase in crimes that take place in the home, e.g. domestic abuse. Domestic abuse and CSEA is already under-reported, and with reduced access to support services,

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victims may be less able to report whilst restrictive measures are in place. Some reduction could be seen in sex offences associated with the night time economy, however these are likely to be balanced with more sex offences that may take place in private settings and an increase in online offences, such as indecent imagery which police may have less capacity to target. While we cannot be certain, we are cautiously optimistic that homicide levels may remain stable, given that recent rises have been driven by male-on-male street violence. However, victims and witnesses of high-harm crimes are likely to be impacted by reductions/changes to witness services and court hearings.

5. We anticipate a decrease in the volume of acquisitive crimes including robbery and theft during this period. As more people work from home and travel less there will be reduced opportunities to commit these offences. Reoffending for acquisitive crime is highest of all crime types, notably for theft, so we may see a reduction in reoffending. We do not anticipate any change in the volume of criminal damage and arson, commercial properties which remain unoccupied may be particularly vulnerable.
6. Police recorded possession offences for drugs and weapons are likely to fall due to likely changes in police priorities. In relation to drug trafficking we expect international supply chains will likely be impacted by travel restrictions, and we may see supply increasingly shift to the dark web. Drug consumption patterns may also change – in particular, party drugs linked to the night-time economy.
7. School closures could contribute to increases in public order offences, depending on what restrictions are in place. We may also see increases in hate crime, and potentially localised disorder if the public are unable to access necessary essentials, shop workers will likely be particularly vulnerable to abuse. However, overall we might expect public order offences to decrease due to restrictions on public gatherings.
8. This initial assessment summarises the collective judgement of Home Office analysts with experience interpreting crime statistics, trends and research. Crime has not changed in a predictable way for years and other assessments of potential changes to crime in the current situation may differ to our own in such a fast-moving and complex environment. We have considered how we expect the situation to affect the volume of crimes for the crime categories used in crime recording. Other assessments may seek to offer judgement on how crimes are committed and how criminals adapt their modus operandi to the current situation.
9. Further analysis would be required to look at the impacts of police abstraction, due to Covid 19 related activities, on response and investigation. There are also wider issues such as the functioning of forensic services which will have an impact on case quality and flow.
10. Shifts in crime prevalence won't necessarily be reflected in crime statistics. Some crime types, such as sexual offences, are already heavily under reported. It is likely that vulnerable groups will be preyed upon during this period, which may be difficult for police to proactively monitor. Changes in policing focus may also affect both crime recording and charges.