The economic and social costs of crime

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Abstract

Every day decisions are made by policy makers and managers in the Criminal Justice System which reflect implicit judgements about the relative seriousness of different crimes, or about the benefits of pursuing one approach to reducing crime rather than another. This study represents a first step towards making such judgements more explicit and in making sure they better reflect the available evidence on the impacts on society of different types of crime.

Cost of crime estimates can play an important role in helping the government to achieve the greatest impact on crime for the money spent. They can be used in both appraisal and evaluation of crime reduction policies, such as those in the Government’s evidence-based Crime Reduction Programme. They can help us to prioritise, focusing scarce resources on policies that have the biggest impact on harm caused by crime, rather than simply the number of crimes. Moreover, one of the two aims of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) is “to reduce crime and the fear of crime and their social and economic costs”. This study reports on progress towards a cost of crime measure that can be used to assess performance against this aim. Figures used here represent the best available evidence, but nevertheless needs to be much improved. The aim of this report is to stimulate debate and improvements in the evidence.

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