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SCCJR
The Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research

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Victims of Crime

Actual risk of victimisation

The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS)

1. is conducted every two years across the whole of Scotland
2. is a large-scale social survey (12,000 face-to-face interviews with adults over 16 living in private households)
3. asks people in Scotland about their experiences and perceptions of crime.

The 2019-2020 survey (the most recent survey) found that:

1. the estimated number of incidents of overall crime experienced by adults has fallen from 20.4% in 2008-2009 to 14.5% in 2014-15 to 11.9% in 2019-20
2. most adults were not victims of any crime in 2019/20, with 11.9% estimated to have experienced at least one crime
3. this risk of victimisation is lower in Scotland (11.9%) than in England and Wales, where the risk of being a victim is 13.3%.

What about demographic (population) characteristics?

1. Location

   Those living in deprived areas have a greater risk of being a victim of crime than those who do not live in deprived areas:

The likelihood of experiencing crime in 2019/20 was higher for those in urban areas and those in the most deprived areas. For those living in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland, the risk of victimisation was 16.5%, compared with 11.2% for the rest of Scotland. Deprivation is defined with reference to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

2. Age

   The risk of being a victim of any crime decreases with age:

   18.3% of those aged between 16 and 24 were at risk of being a victim of any crime, compared to 6.9% of those aged 60 or over.

3. Gender

   The risk of being a victim of crime is slightly higher for males than females:

   Slightly more women (12.3%) compared to men (11.6%) were victims of crime. This is an inversion of the numbers from the previous SCJS, where 12.8% of men reported risk of being a victim of any crime, compared to 12.1% of women.

   Importantly, SCJS does not record the risk of victimisation for transgender and non-binary people.

4. Repeat victims

   3.6% of the adult population experienced multiple victimisation. Multiple victimisation refers to the proportion of the population that experienced two or more property crimes or two or more violent crimes (repeat victimisation), or have been victims of both types of crime. The likelihood of multiple victimisation has fallen from 8.2% in 2008-2009 to 3.6% in 2019-20.

Case Study: Cathleen

For Cathleen Lauder being stared at, talked about and harassed because she is a transgender woman is part of everyday life. She has been subjected to verbal abuse, intimidation and unwanted physical contact ever since she transitioned. She never felt confident enough to report the abuse: she had no proof, and she was concerned about how the police would respond. But then a friend bought her a mobile phone so she could record 'hate crimes' when they happened.

In April 2015 Cathleen was on a bus in Edinburgh when two men and a woman started calling her names, singing offensive songs and making rude gestures at her. Trapped in a small space and worried that the abuse could escalate, Cathleen began recording on her phone. She got off the bus as soon as possible. It was only at the police station, as she was giving her statement, that she realised how much the incident had affected her.

This time Cathleen could provide evidence, and the Crown Office and the Procurator Fiscal Service decided to prosecute one of the perpetrators. A court date was set for December 2015. Cathleen dreaded having to appear in front of a jury, but she welcomed the opportunity to receive justice. It was a shock to find the court hearing cancelled because the evidence had been lost. She had to wait another eight months for her case to be heard.

Cathleen had experienced persistent, 'low-level' hate crime for two years, and when at last she had the confidence to report it, the workings of the criminal justice system brought additional trauma and frustration. "I think there's still a lot of mistrust between trans people and the police," she says. "Historically the police and other authorities have been prejudiced towards LGBT people and this has prevented LGBT people from reporting… It is only through better community engagement and training that things will improve."

Since the court case, Police Scotland have set up a network of LGBTI liaison officers trained by the Equality Network, a Scottish LGBTI charity. It will be important to monitor how this improves the confidence of LGBTI people in the police.

Source: https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/ether/hate-crimes-uk-victims-stories

Perceived risk of victimisation

How do adults feel about their local area?

1. 45% of adults in 2019-2020 in Scotland believed that crime had increased across the country as a whole in the two years prior to the interview.
2. Women were less likely to think crime had been stable or fallen across the country as a whole than men (39% compared to 52% respectively).
3. Older people were less likely to believe crime rate was stable or fallen.

4. 73% of adults in 2019-2020 perceived the crime rate in their local area to have stayed the same or reduced over the last couple of years. This number has improved from 69% in 2008-2009 and stayed mostly unchanged from 2018-2019.
5. 77% said they felt very or fairly safe walking alone in their neighbourhood at night, and 96% felt safe in their home alone at night. This was up from 66% in 2008/09 and unchanged from 2016/17.

However, there are some demographic differences. Women were more likely to report feeling unsafe walking alone at night in their neighbourhood compared to men (33% women vs 11% men). Women and people living in the most deprived areas were less likely to feel safe than men and people living in the rest of Scotland.

Fraud was the crime that the members of the public were most commonly worried about. 50% of adults worried about their credit or bank card details being used, while only 16% of adults were concerned about being physically assaulted.

The survey also found that 57% of the population did not think they were likely to experience any of the crimes covered in the next year, an increase from 48% in 2008-2009 and 50% in 2018-19. Generally, members of the public think they are at greater risk of being a victim than they actually are. For example, in the 2019-20 survey 4.7% respondents thought they would be attacked in the street next year, yet the prevalence rate for all assaults was 2.4%.

For more information on public perceptions of crime, see **SCCJR 'Crime and the media'**.

Find out more about fear of crime here.

Hate crime statistics in Scotland

UK law recognizes that any crime can be prosecuted as a **hate crime** if the offender has either: a) demonstrated hostility based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity; or b) been motivated by either of those 5 characteristics. A person can be a victim of more than one type of hate crime.

The SCJS does not provide statistics on hate crime victimisation. Those can be accessed from The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.
The 2022-23 report found that:

- There were 5,738 charges containing at least one element of hate crime, a marginal decrease compared to 2020-21 (0.2%);

- The majority of hate crimes were committed based on race. The 2022-23 total is the lowest figure since 2019-20, and is 31% lower than the peak in such charges in 2011-12
- The number of hate crimes related to sexual orientation increased by 2%;
- Hate crimes relating to disability increased by 3% and this is the highest number reported since the legislation creating this aggravation came into force in 2010. It has increased by over 50% since 2021-22;
- Religious aggravation increased by 8% since 2021-22;
- Charges with an aggravation of transgender identity were lower than reported in 2021-22, but it remained the second highest number since the legislation introducing this aggravation came into force in 2010.

Discussion suggestion:
Where does the fear of crime amongst the general population come from? Think about the media portrayal of crime, as well as different individual characteristics of victims and how they influence the perceptions of crime. How could fear of crime be reduced?

Scottish Government response to victims of crime

The Scottish Government has committed to work with the justice organisations to help victims and witnesses feel supported, safe and informed at every stage of the process.

Improvements were brought in by the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014 which included:

1. the right for victims of certain crimes to specify the gender of their police interviewer;
2. the right for victims and witnesses to access information about the progress of their case;
3. publication of service standards for victims and witnesses so they know what to expect from criminal justice agencies.

As part of the commitments made in the Scottish Government plan: Justice in Scotland: vision and priorities and the Programme for Government 2017 to 2018 with repeated commitments in subsequent programmes for government (e.g. 2023-2024 Programme for Government) it is working with justice partners and other organisations to build on this, by:

1. reviewing current support for victims of crime, and looking at the potential to introduce a single point of contact to help victims through the process;

2. providing better support for child and other vulnerable witnesses;
3. introducing a statutory duty to provide appropriate adult support to vulnerable adults during police procedures.

A Victims Taskforce was also established in 2018 (which the SCCJR has representation on) with the primary role of co-ordinating and driving action to improve the experiences of victims and witnesses within the criminal justice system, whilst ensuring a fair justice system for those accused of crime.

Further reading

Amnesty International UK, Hate Crimes in the UK – the victims' stories. Available from: https://www.amnesty.org.uk/blogs/ether/hate-crimes-uk-victims-stories

COPFS (2023) Hate Crime in Scotland 2022-23. Available from: https://www.copfs.gov.uk/publications/hate-crime-in-scotland-2022-23/html/

Dinisman, T and Moroz, A (2017) Understanding Victims of Crime: The impact of the crime and support needs. Available from: https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/documents/files/VS_Understanding%20victims%20of%20crime_web.pdf

Rader, N. (2017) Fear of Crime. Available from: https://oxfordre.com/criminology/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264079-e-10;jsessionid=BA9B0694DAC2C93FF4220939899C56FF

Scottish Government (2021) *Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019-2020, 'Main Findings*'. Available from: Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/20: main findings - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

Scottish Government (2017) Justice in Scotland: Vision and Priorities. Available from: https://www.gov.scot/publications/justice-scotland-vision-priorities/

Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014. Available from: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2014/1/contents

Updated 2023
SCCJR's learning resources for schools (Modern Studies) were initially developed by Rebecca Foster and Greg Duncan. They are regularly reviewed and updated by SCCJR researchers. Any queries (including notes of broken links, ideas for development and new topics) about these resources should be sent to enquiries@sccjr.ac.uk

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