

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

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