

Evidence-based policing research brief

The New Zealand Crime Harm Index

Purpose

This brief provides information about the New Zealand Crime Harm Index, developed by the New Zealand Police, which enables harm from crime in New Zealand to be measured. It summarises a published paper that describes the method used to develop the Index¹.

What is a Crime Harm Index?

The most simple and common method of measuring crime is to count the number of crimes; however, this means that one minor crime is counted the same as a very serious crime. By comparison, a Crime Harm Index is a measurement of crime in which the crimes are weighted based on how much “harm” they cause, relative to other crimes.

The first weighted index developed was the United Kingdom’s Cambridge Crime Harm Index². The Cambridge Crime Harm Index weights crimes by the sentence that UK Sentencing Guidelines state is the starting point or ‘tariff’ for the crime; in other words, the minimum sentence an offender is likely to receive, if the crime was committed by a single person. Non-prison sentences, such as home detention, community work or a fine, are translated into an equivalent number of days in prison.

New Zealand doesn’t have sentencing guidelines or regulations, so the New Zealand Crime Harm Index estimates the minimum sentence an offender is likely to receive using data from actual sentences delivered by courts. As with the Cambridge Crime Harm Index, non-prison sentences are converted into equivalent prison days. The New Zealand Crime Harm Index includes weights for over 6,000 different offence codes. The minimum sentence is then used as a weight when calculating the total harm from crime.

CHI weight x crime count = total harm

Offence code	CHI weight	2015 # offences	Total harm
1111 Murders (other weapon)	5,337	9	48,003
2653 Males rapes female over 16	1,462	425	621,138
4129 Other burglary (other property)	4	12,368	50,689
1649 Other common assault	19	38,211	716,456
5127 Wilful damage	5	18,690	122,880
TOTAL		69,703	1,738,058

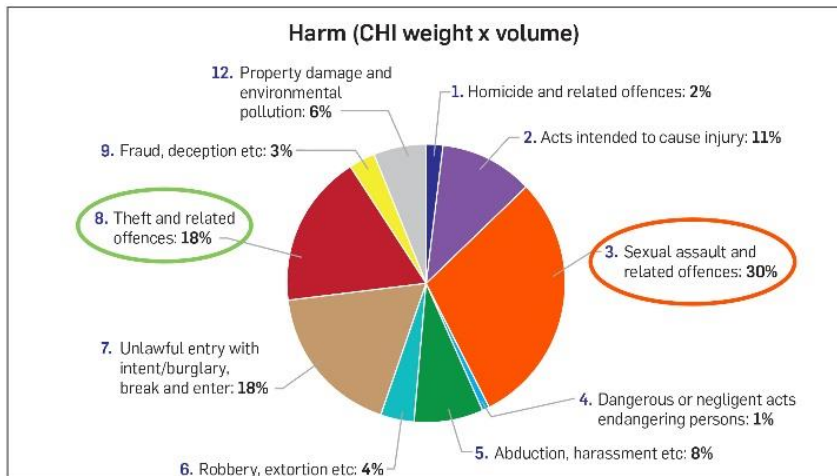
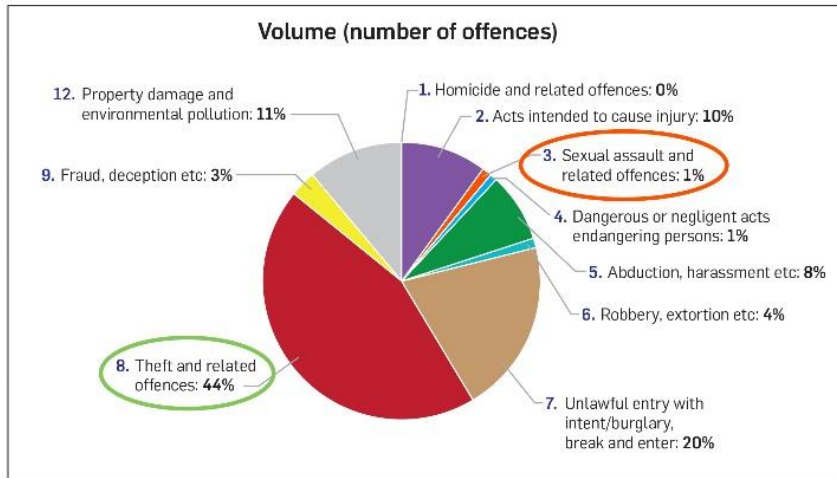
What does this mean?

Creating a sentence-based Crime Harm Index allows New Zealand Police to categorise crimes according to the relative amount of harm they cause, rather than by volume, and make appropriate resourcing decisions.

The New Zealand Crime Harm Index is also available to other agencies and academic researchers to use in analysing and researching crime in New Zealand.

It also provides an alternative approach for other jurisdictions, which do not have standardised minimum sentences.

However, no matter what approach is used, it is important to understand that all current Crime Harm Indices are proxy measures and indicators of relative harm only, not precise direct measures of harm, and results should be interpreted accordingly.



Why do we need the crime harm index?

A reliable and validated Crime Harm Index enables the Triple T of evidence-based policing – targeting, testing and tracking¹.

Targeting – focusing on high harm places and populations.

- Police are able to deploy staff and resources to locations and people experiencing or causing the most harm.

Testing – what tactics and interventions reduce harm?

- Evidence-based policing is about ensuring Police can make decisions based on the best possible research, data and knowledge of what works to reduce crime and harm.

Tracking – how is harm changing over time?

- The Crime Harm Index allows Police to track how the level of harm, caused by different offences, changes over time.

For more information

Curtis-Ham, S. & Walton, D. (2017). The New Zealand Crime Harm Index: Quantifying harm using sentencing data. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pax050>.

New Zealand Police (2017) *Crime Harm Index (Version 6) User Guide*. Wellington, New Zealand Police.

Email research@police.govt.nz

ⁱ Curtis-Ham, S., & Walton, D. (2017). The New Zealand crime harm index: quantifying harm using sentencing data. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pax050>.

ⁱⁱ Sherman, L., Neyroud, P., and Neyroud, E. (2016). The Cambridge Crime Harm Index: Measuring Total Harm from Crime Based on Sentencing Guidelines. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 10(3): 171-183.