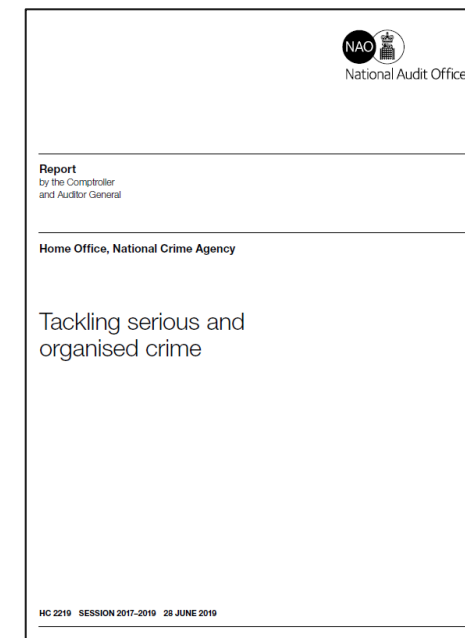


**ORGANISED CRIME**



## ONS Research Excellence Series 2023

### ADR UK Research Fellows: Insights from criminal justice data

*A national data linkage study to assess the extent, nature and outcomes of serious and organised crime cases prosecuted before the Crown Court in England and Wales (2013-2020)*

# What were the aims of the project?

Undertake exploratory analysis to:

- Better understand the **extent, nature and outcomes** of serious and organised crime (SOC) heard before the Crown Courts in England and Wales between 2013 and 2020.
- Estimate the **crime 'severity'** or harm attributable to these SOC appearances (vs. non-SOC ones) using ONS Crime Severity Scores – *a weight calculated using sentencing data for England and Wales over a five-year period (2015-2019) (e.g., murder=7,832; cannabis possession=2)*.
- Assess how this crime severity was distributed across different offence types, SOC groups, and locations (including any links between SOC and indices of multiple deprivation).
- Test for any association between SOC status and the likelihood of **cases being discontinued, dismissed or acquitted** (and factors most predictive of this outcome).
- Finally, it assessed the feasibility of measuring subsequent **reappearances of SOC defendants before the courts** over time (vs non-SOC defendants) (e.g., looking at rate, frequency, seriousness and recall).

# Data sources

- Crown Court Data (*XHIBIT*,  $N \Rightarrow 862k$  individual-level records between 2013-2020).
- Magistrates' Court Data (*LIBRA*,  $N \Rightarrow 10.5M$  individual-level records between 2013-2020).
- Prisoner Custodial Journey Dataset (*p-NOMIS*,  $N \Rightarrow 1.3M$  individual-level records between 2011-2020).

# Identifying SOC cases within the court data

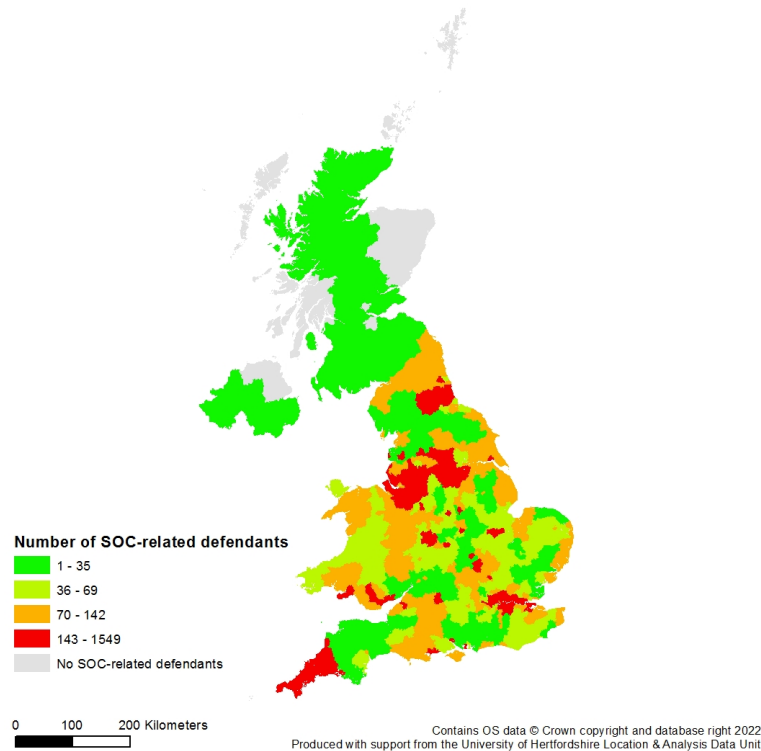
- The administrative datasets do not contain SOC or OCG-specific flags. These have to be constructed.
- SOC is a **contested concept** and **various definitions** exist (e.g. von Lampe has identified 200+).
- Francis et al (2013) defined SOC as 185 offences with some degree of **planning, control and co-ordination**, receiving a **minimum custodial sentence of three years** upon conviction, and where **co-defendants** were involved.
- Using this definition does not provide a complete or comprehensive picture of SOC, but should instead be interpreted as relating to a proxy group of such cases.
- Francis et al and more recently Ashby (2015) found **low prevalence levels of SOC** (0.2% and 0.5% respectively) within the known offender groups they examined using this definition.

# Low prevalence of SOC, but disproportionate crime severity which was experienced differently across England and Wales

- Few Crown Court **appearances (6%)** (52,597 of 862,816) and **cases (3%)** (21,168 of 780,326) between 2013-2020 met the criteria for SOC.
- A small % of all Crown Court appearances accounted for a **disproportionate amount** of the total crime severity generated: 10% of appearances were responsible for almost half (46%) the total crime severity dealt with by the Crown Court.
- Average (median) crime severity scores were more than **3x higher** for SOC-related appearances (667 vs. 203), which **accounted for 5% of the overall crime severity** associated with Crown Court caseload.
- Most (72%) of the total **severity associated with SOC-related appearances** was attributable to drugs offences (followed by violence at 12%).
- Adjusting for population size, **per capita crime severity** linked to SOC-related appearances **varied geographically** (e.g., being two to three times the rate in the North West and London compared with other regions of E&W).

# At a local authority level, SOC-related appearances were concentrated in the North West and Midlands

**Figure 1.** *SOC-related appearances before the Crown Court in England and Wales, by local authority of residence (2013-2020) (N=42,379)*



Between 2013-2020, the five local authority areas of residence with the highest number of SOC-related appearances before the higher courts were:

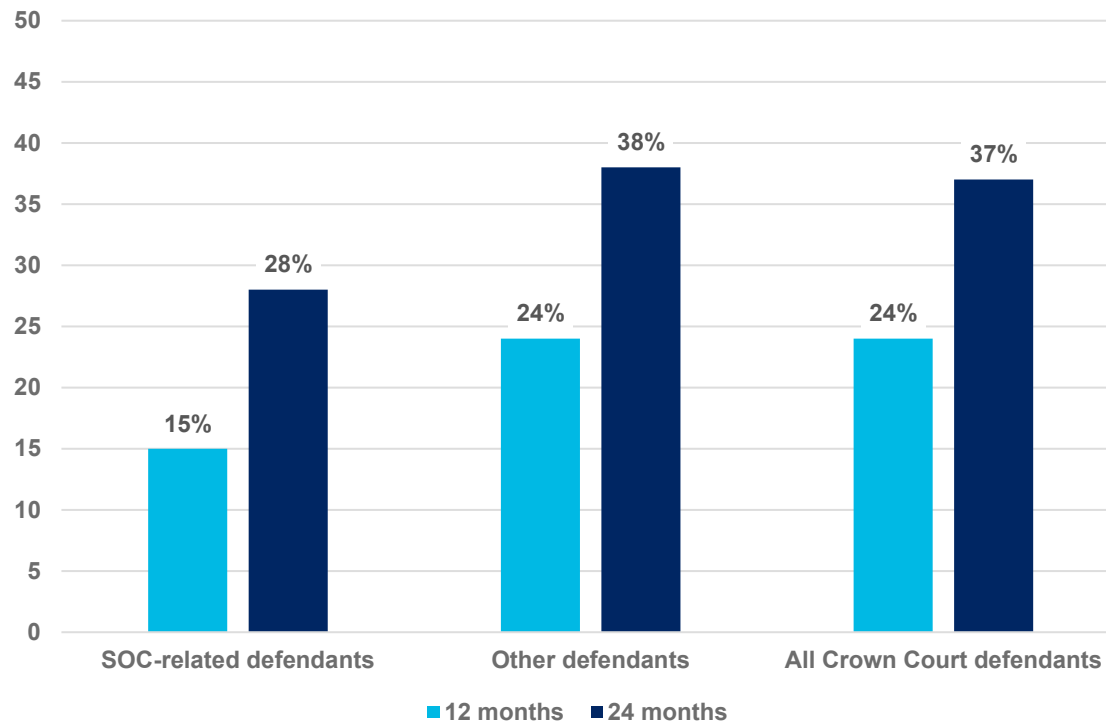
- Birmingham
- Liverpool
- Leeds
- Manchester
- Bradford

# SOC appearances linked to more affluent areas and they experienced different court outcomes

- Indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) rankings were, on average, higher (i.e., **less deprived**) for SOC-related appearances in England (8,225 vs. 7,794) and Wales (524 vs. 492).
- Overall, SOC-related appearances were **less likely** to have involved defendants who resided in the **20% most deprived areas** in England and Wales (42% vs. 44%).
- Half (49%) of Crown Court appearances involved a **guilty plea**, with this being significantly more likely for SOC-related appearances (65% vs. 47%). **Conviction rates** higher too (79% vs. 56%), but varied by offence.
- Trials were, on average, **significantly longer** in length for those cases involving at least one defendant meeting the criteria for **SOC (121 days)** when compared with other cases heard before the Crown Court (**10 days**).
- A higher proportion of SOC appearances **heard before a jury** had proceedings against them **discontinued, dismissed, or were acquitted** (a DDA outcome) (46% vs. 23%).
- The variable which exerted the greatest influence on a **DDA outcome in multivariate analysis** for SOC-related appearances (accounting for defendants' age, ethnicity, main offence, crime severity, and region of residence) was **gender** ( $OR=1.904$ ;  $95\%CI=1.740-2.085$ ).

# Fewer SOC defendants reappeared at court for further offences within two years

**Figure 2.** Reappearance rates before the criminal courts for a further charge within 12 and 24 months of the first Crown Court appearance between 2013 and 2018, by group (N=387,914)



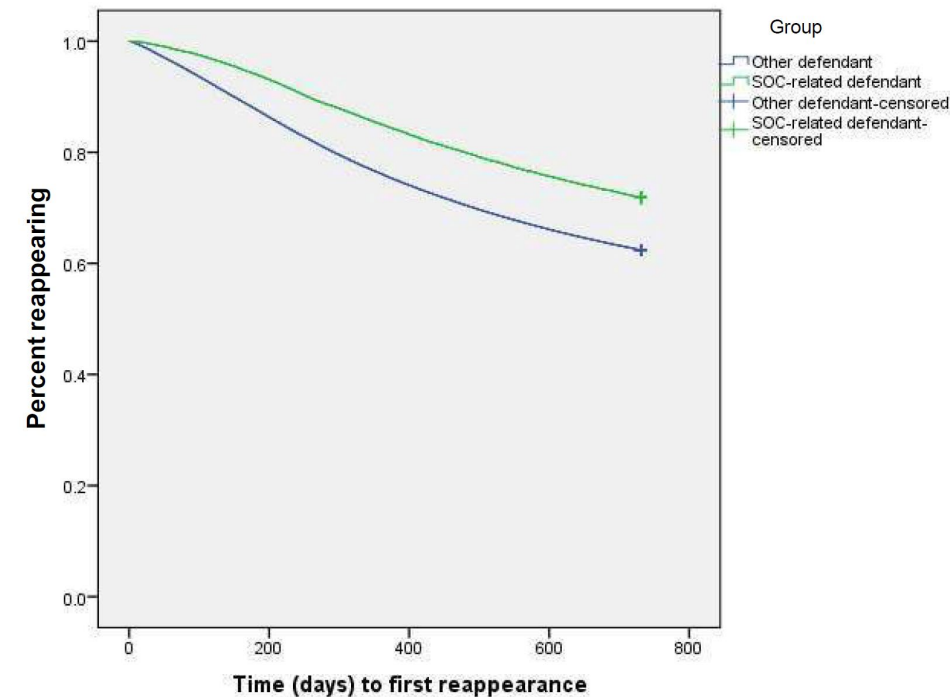
- Almost two in five **Crown Court defendants (37%)** reappeared before the criminal courts within 24 months for another offence/charge.
- The rate of reappearance was lower for **SOC-related defendants (28%)** over this two-year follow-up period relative to **other defendants (38%)**.



# Finally, SOC defendants took longer to reappear, their charges had reduced in severity, there were fewer reappearances overall, and they had a lower recall rate

- Using survival (or time-to-event) analysis, SOC-related defendants had a **17% reduced risk of reappearing** before the criminal courts within two years for a further offence compared to other defendants ( $aHR=.834$ ;  $95\% CI=.811-858$ ).
- SOC defendants **took longer to reappear** (342 days) than others (273 days).
- SOC-related defendants were more likely to have reappeared for **further charges of reduced seriousness** (88% vs. 78%).
- On average, SOC defendants **had fewer reappearances** (1) than other defendants (2) ( $IRR=.65$ ,  $95\% CI=.63-.68$ ).
- For those imprisoned, 8% had been **recalled to custody** within two years of their release date, but less likely for SOC defendants (2% vs. 8%).

**Figure 3.** Survival analysis for days to first reappearance for a further offence within 24 months, by group (N=387,914)



# Thanks for listening

***Disclaimer:** This work was produced using statistical data from ONS.*

*The use of the ONS statistical data in this work does not imply the endorsement of the ONS or other data owners (e.g., MoJ and HMCTS) in relation to the interpretation or analysis of the statistical data.*

*This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce National Statistics aggregates.*

