

Cost category Costs in response to crime

Cost item Probation

Definition Probation (sometimes referred to as a 'community penalty' or 'community punishment') is a widely used disposal in many countries. It may involve offender supervision at varying degrees of intensity. Probation programmes may be tailored to offender needs, particularly if criminogenic needs such as substance misuse, cognitive deficits or weak basic skills have been identified.

Theoretical discussion link to

Preferred estimation methodology As with prison terms the preferred methodology is to identify the number of offenders receiving probation disposals for an offence type, to identify the type of order and its average length and thereby to calculate the average cost of probation for offenders with whom it is used. This is then adjusted for the proportion of offenders convicted for that offence type with whom probation is used.

Comments One complication is wide variation across the content of probation programmes. Some involve one-to-one work with highly qualified staff whilst others might involve minimal supervision of a group of offenders undertaking unpaid work. There may be many different types of 'probation order' that can be imposed. In many probation services there has not been a strong emphasis on collecting managerial data on the detail of time allocation across offender or offence types. So most cost estimation is inevitably rather crude. If the preferred estimation method cannot be applied the alternative is to produce some rather crude estimate of average cost. In extreme cases this will be total probation service costs divided by the number of offenders given a probation sentence. But it is often possible to be more discriminating than this and to identify some categories of more costly probation sentence that are used with higher tariff offences.

Usage Probation is widely used and its costs normally included in cost of crime estimation

Offences normally included All offence types for which probation disposals may be used: generally excludes the most serious offences where it will only be used in exceptional circumstances

Formula average length of probation sentence for offence type j (e.g. in months)*average cost per month per case of probation time*number of offenders convicted of offence type j given probation sentences: divide by estimated number of offences to get average costs per case.

Data sources Reports of probation service or agencies; sentencing statistics;

Example (hypothetical example: based on alternative methodology)

Burglary:

10,000,000.00 Total costs of probation service
10% share of total probation orders for burglary
1,000,000.00 total probation costs for burglary (£)
20,000.00 number of estimated burglaries
£ 50.00 cost per offence