

Fines not fair for vulnerable

February 28 2013



Despite recent amendments, Victoria's infringement system does not adequately consider the circumstances of disadvantaged and vulnerable people, new research has revealed.

A report to be released today presented the first snapshot of the impact of fines, and Victoria's current system for processing fines, on disadvantaged people and on the [criminal justice system](#). It revealed how some disadvantaged groups were more vulnerable to being fined, and as a result of unpaid fines were unfairly and unnecessarily drawn into the justice system.

The study, conducted by Dr Bernadette Saunders, Dr Anna Eriksson and Associate Professor Gaye Lansdell through the [Criminal Justice Research Consortium](#) at Monash University, found that in comparison to other groups in society, an [infringement](#) notice impacted disproportionately on disadvantaged people, particularly those experiencing drug or [alcohol dependency](#), who were homeless, mentally ill, had an intellectual disability or experiencing poverty.

Dr Saunders said the report highlighted the importance of rectifying this disadvantage and why reforms to the current system were necessary.

"In Victoria, almost five million infringement notices were issued in the period of 2010-11 and with the continued expansion of the infringements system more people will inevitably come within its reach," Dr Saunders said.

"There are serious weaknesses in the current system. While there are provisions in place to ensure those experiencing disadvantage are not unfairly caught up in the system, these provisions do not adequately protect socially isolated groups including those experiencing extreme [financial hardship](#) and victims of domestic violence.

"Some people experiencing disadvantage may never be in a position to pay fines due to their circumstances. This can lead to an accrual that may result in a matter being heard in court or even a [criminal conviction](#), which only exacerbates this disadvantage and may contribute to cyclical

or long-term homelessness and poverty. This also results in pointless systemic expenditure, especially the resources of Community Legal Centres and Victorian Legal Aid."

The study detailed the complexity of the fine enforcement system in Victoria and several made recommendations.

"Law reform is needed to address the impact of fines on disadvantaged people and reduce the expenditure of resources to resolve unpaid fines," Dr Saunders said.

The research found disadvantaged groups often incurred fines for offences in a public place, moving vehicles, parking and public transport offences.

Provided by Monash University

Citation: Fines not fair for vulnerable (2013, February 28) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-02-fines-fair-vulnerable.html>

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