

COVID rule fines peaked in latter stages of lockdown in the UK

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Most fines for COVID rule breaches were issued when England was in its third national lockdown and Wales was in its second, research shows.

Almost two thirds of the 120,000-plus fixed penalty notices (FPNs) given out by police across the two nations were issued between January and May 2021.

COVID restrictions

The findings emerge from analysis of FPNs imposed for illegal movement, social gatherings and failure to follow police instructions during the restrictions of 27 March 2020 to 31 May 2021.

The University of Edinburgh study gives fresh insights into the profile of people who were issued with police fines during the pandemic in England and Wales.

Fresh profiles

The majority of FPNs were given to men and to [younger people](#)—with those aged 18 to 24 being at least four times more likely to be fined than people in other [age groups](#), the study found.

Three quarters of FPNs were issued to [white people](#) but, proportionately, people from ethnic minorities were 2.3 times more likely than white people to receive an FPN in England and 2.8 times more likely in Wales.

Disadvantaged communities

Fines were also issued more frequently to people living in disadvantaged communities. During the first lockdown, FPN recipients were 7.2 times more likely to be living in one of the most economically deprived areas of England or Wales than in one of the least disadvantaged areas.

The study team found the majority of fines issued were for breaches of

restriction on movement and attending gatherings. Less than five percent of FPNs issued in England and Wales were for failing to comply with instructions or obstructing police activity to uphold the regulations.

Fines

Most people received only one COVID fine, although 4.4% received two or more. The median cost of a single fine was £100, but this increased to £500 for those who received more than one. Repeat recipients were significantly more likely to be living in an economically deprived area.

Taking population size into account, the rate of FPNs issued in Wales was 1.9 times higher than in England, and rates for all of the Police Force Areas in Wales were higher than any of those in England. Differences between the two countries did, however, reduce over time.

Illegal travel

The report suggests that differences in patterns of illegal travel and movement may explain the higher rate of fining in Wales. Three quarters of all FPNs that were issued to non-residents of Police Force Areas in Wales involved people who had traveled from England, whereas only one percent of fines issued to non-residents of Police Force Areas in England had traveled from Wales.

There were also differences between England and Wales in the way some trends changed over the 15-month study period. For instance, disparities in the rate of fines issued to white and ethnic minority groups declined over time in Wales, but increased in England.

Valuable insights

Researchers say the report provides valuable insights into the pattern of [police](#) enforcement over three distinct periods of the pandemic.

They say it is important to note that there were some differences in the regulations in each nation—with periods of restriction lasting longer in Wales than England and higher [fine](#) values in England.

"For the first time, this report provides a comprehensive picture of those who received fines for breaching the Coronavirus regulations in England and Wales. It is important to understand how patterns of enforcement varied across different groups in the population and different parts of the country, as this helps us to identify potential inequalities in how the Regulations impacted on different groups, and the consequences of this in terms of financial penalties," says Professor Susan McVie.

More information: Report: [blogs.ed.ac.uk/edinburghlawschool-2023-final-1.pdf](https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/edinburghlawschool/2023/03/covid-fines-peaked-stages-lockdown.html)

Provided by University of Edinburgh

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