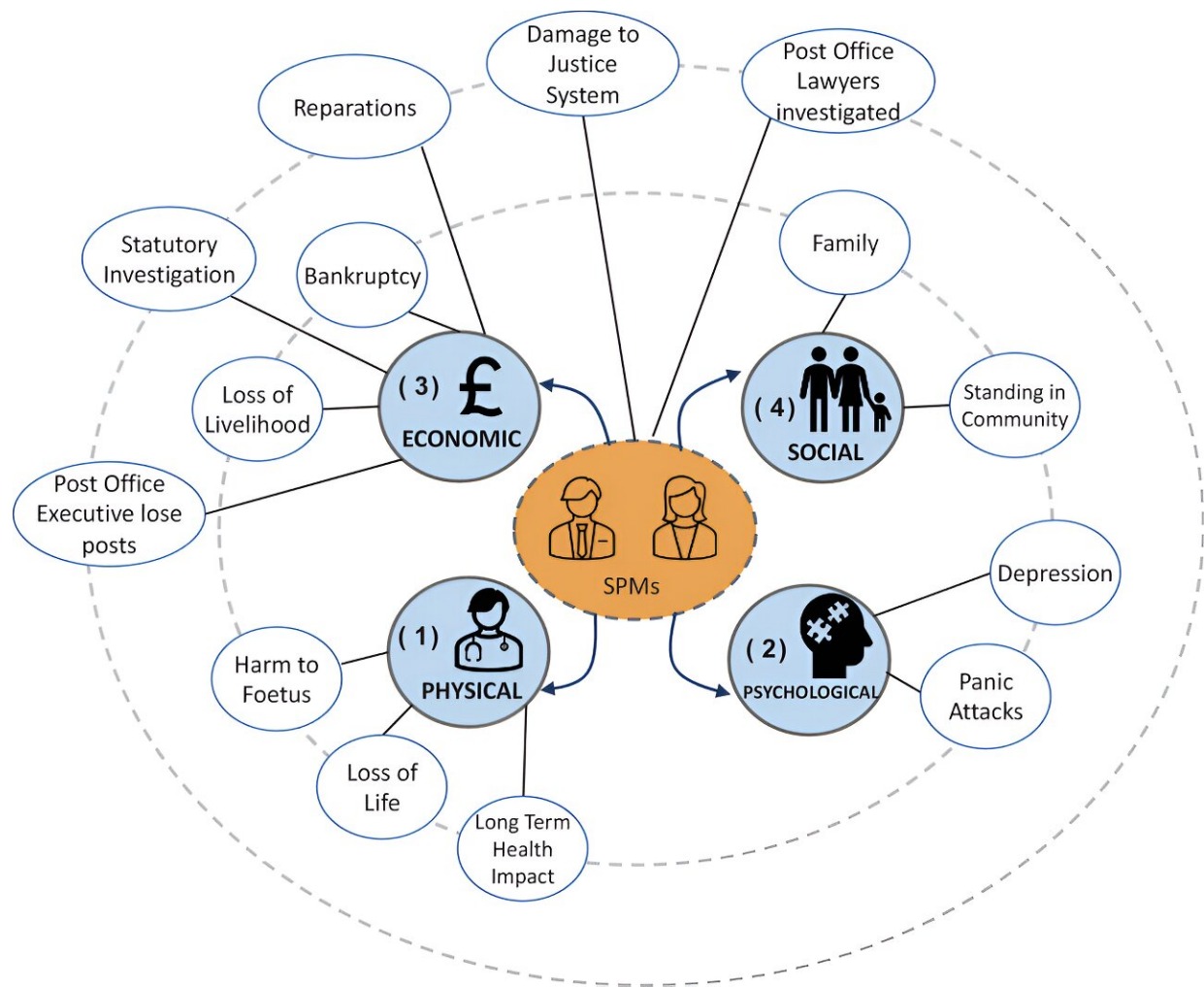


'Post Office Horizon' scandal exposes dangers of 'technological justice', according to study

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Visualization of zemiological analysis of harms in the SPM case. Credit: *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice* (2023). DOI: 10.1111/hojo.12533

A new study examines how the Post Office Horizon scandal exposes the dangers of 'technological justice'. Researchers also emphasize the dangers of 'technological rationality', where technology shapes not only our actions but also our capacity for critical thinking and understanding of harm.

The software, called Horizon, was implemented in the early 2000s to manage finances across the Post Office network. However, the system contained errors that generated false accounting shortfalls, leading the Post Office to accuse sub-postmasters of theft wrongly. Over 700 individuals faced prosecution based on faulty data, with many experiencing financial ruin, [emotional distress](#), and even imprisonment.

Dr. Michael McGuire, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Surrey, said, "The Post Office Horizon scandal serves as a stark reminder of the potential pitfalls of 'technological justice.'"

"When legal decisions are based primarily on technical data, without proper scrutiny and consideration of social context, the risk of miscarriages of justice becomes significant."

The study uses a zemiological framework to analyze the various harms inflicted by the scandal, including [financial losses](#), emotional trauma, and societal damage. Zemiology is the study of social harms and originated as a critique of criminology and the notion of crime. In contrast with 'individual-based harms' such as theft, the notion of social harm or social injury incorporates harms caused by nation-states and corporations.

However, the authors argue that this framework alone falls short of fully comprehending how technology itself can contribute to such injustices.

Dr. Michael McGuire continued, "By critically examining the Post Office scandal through the lens of technology and justice, we can work towards developing more robust frameworks that safeguard against future miscarriages of [justice](#) and ensure responsible integration of technology within the [legal system](#)."

This research underscores the urgent need for a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between technology and legal processes, fostering a legal system that is both efficient and grounded in critical human judgment.

The full study has been published in the [*Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*](#).

More information: M. R. McGuire et al, Harm, injustice & technology: Reflections on the UK's subpostmasters' case, *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/hojo.12533](https://doi.org/10.1111/hojo.12533)

Provided by University of Surrey

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