

“Discuss the relationship of criminal behaviour to gender, social class, locality, and ethnicity.”

Introduction

In the modern world of criminology, it is no surprise that crimes happen every single day. They appear in the papers, on television and the internet on a daily basis. Crime is something that affects everyone, whether big or small, directly or indirectly. It is therefore only natural that many people try to find the cause of criminal behaviour, trying to understand the reasons why some people may turn to crime. In fact, the roots of criminal behaviour have been debated extensively. Some researchers' link physiological factors such as gender and ethnicity, and many have contemplated the link between social class and locality. These variables are all fundamental when dealing with criminal behaviour. Consequently I will submerge into the findings and statistics of crime rates, discussing the relationship of criminal behaviour to gender, social class, locality and ethnicity.

Criminal Behaviour and Gender

Gender is perhaps the forefront of criminal behaviour. In short, men commit more crimes than women do. According to a study carried out by the Office of the National Statistics in 2008, it was reported that 80% of criminal acts were perpetrated by males. This seems to be the general consensus across the world. As we see the same pattern occurring in the United States, shown to us by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, there are 14 times more male prisoners than female. The same study reports that only about 7% of the entire prison population is comprised of women.¹ This large difference is what leads researchers to believe that gender may have an extensive influence on criminal acts. There is much speculation as to the reason why this may be.² Many believe that it is the biology of a male, particularly the male hormone, testosterone, that causes men to be more violent and dominant, producing an innate reaction to competition. If we look again at the statistics, it tells us that men commit on average more serious and violent crimes than women do.³ In 2004, males were almost 10 times more likely to commit murder than females; women on the other hand commit the lesser of offences such as shop lifting.

This is not to say that women rarely commit crimes. In fact, the statistics provided may not be as accurate as we think. As many crimes are unreported. These statistics are restricted only to crimes which have been reported and people who have been convicted. Being convicted of a crime is certainly different than committing one. As we know, females commit the lesser of offences such as shop lifting and many times their acts go unreported, especially when the matter is dealt with. It was found in 2004, males were almost 10 times more likely to commit murder than females; yet they are also far more likely to be the victims of violent crime. Men are much more likely than women to experience “Stranger violence”, a violent act from someone that they do not know. 44% of violent incidents against men were of this kind; this kind of behaviour thus justifies some crimes.

¹ Ehow. n.d. *Gender Influences on Criminal behaviour* [Online]. Available at: www.ehow.com/info_8270108_gender-influences-criminal-behavior.html [Accessed 21 September 11]

² BBC. 2007. *At a Glance: Crime Statistics 2007* [Online]. Available at: www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6906554.stm [Accessed 21 September 11]

³ Crime. 2010. *Crime Statistics* [Online]. Available at: www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0DXK/is_24_18/ai_82770922/ [Accessed 21 September 11]

Criminal Behaviour and Social Class

Class is directly associated with economic, social and political power. It is the notion that people act in the world in accordance with their relationships with others around them and the communal resources available to them. When investigating criminal behaviour and social class, there are three main classes. White-collar workers; typically associated with individuals of a higher social class, blue-collar workers; individuals who do manual work and are consequently from a lower social class, and the unemployed; individuals who do not have/cannot find work. In short, blue-collar crime makes up the majority of crimes committed. In the United States, Sutherland said: "less than two per cent of the persons committed to prisons in a year belong to the upper-class" Consequently the latter 98% are of blue-collar workers and the unemployed. Although the percentage has increased since, numbers still show a large majority of those in jail are poor, "blue-collar" criminals. This is not to say that white-collar workers do not commit crimes. In fact their crimes often are unreported and uncensored. This is because the crimes committed to the two opposing classes differ majorly. Blue-collar crime is in general, more violent. They consist of crimes such as arson, burglary, theft, assault, rape and vandalism. Whereas white-collar crime involves: fraud, embezzlement, copyright infringement etc.⁴

Their reasons for committing are similar, for money. However, their justifications in doing so are completely different. Blue-collar crime is a highly visible crime committed by the average poor individuals. Most are done because they believe that they have nothing to lose, and everything to gain, by the success or failure of the crime. In essence, their crimes are committed due to a lack of hope. White-collar workers are often opportunists, who learn that they can take advantage of their circumstances to accumulate financial gain. They are educated, intelligent, affluent, confident individuals, who work in highly professional occupations. This allows them the unmonitored access to large sums of money, using their intelligence to con their victims. The FBI defined white-collar crime as "those illegal acts which are characterised by deceit, concealment, or violation of trust which are not dependent upon the application or threat of physical force or violence." In essence, the crimes are very different, using different approaches, but they are nonetheless crimes.

An issue which lies in the heart of social class is unemployment. According to experts, the unemployed are at highest risk for committing blue-collar crimes (i.e. violent crimes). However, they are not charged with these type of crimes at the same high rate as blue-collar workers. The relationship between overall unemployment and crime is inconsistent. Research supports that there is a relationship between unemployment and social class, but a weak one.⁵ However, invasive research on individuals on young males, particularly those from disadvantaged ethnic groups has yet to be done.

Criminal Behaviour and Locality

The general consensus amongst the public is that crimes are predominantly committed in urban areas. This is due to a lot of reasons, for instance, there is a higher population density among urban areas, and thus consequently there is a higher crime rate. Not to mention that a large proportion of crimes are down to opportunity, there is simply more opportunity in an urban area to steal, rob, assault etc. than there is in a rural area. Furthermore in urban areas there are more pubs, bars and nightclubs available to the public. Most assaults are committed due to alcohol and supersede during closing times of pubs, bar and nightclubs. As shown in the program "the Truth about Crime: Violent Crime", which investigated violent crime in Oxford. Their specially commissioned crime maps

⁴ Saigon RFC. 2010. *Blue Collar vs White Collar Crimes* [Online]. Available at: www.saigonrfc.org/blue-collar-vs-white-collar-crimes.html [Accessed 21 September 11]

⁵ St Marys. n.d. *Crime* [Online]. Available at: www.stmarys.ca/~evanderveen/wvdv/crime.htm [Accessed 21 September 11]

showed that there is a “significant correlation between the location of licensed premises (pubs, clubs) and incidents of street crime).⁶

Criminal Behaviour and Ethnicity

Criminologist Cesare Lombroso has argued that there is a strong link between race and crime, saying that “many of the characteristics found in savages, and in the coloured races, are also to be found in habitual delinquents”. Whilst there are some groups that deny the link between crime and ethnic background, there are others who have gone to extreme measures to blame ethnicity for criminal behaviour. Historically, statistics have shown higher rates of arrest and imprisonment for people of the African origin. Under the Criminal Justice Act 1991, section 95, the government collects annual statistics based on race and crime. These statistics have shown to the public the differences in rates of crime between ethnic groups. The black prison population constitutes 10% of the prison population, compared to less than 2% in 1992. This may not seem like a lot, but when compared to with the percentage of Africans in the United Kingdom, it becomes much more significant.⁷

There have been many explanations given for the disproportionate representation rates of arrest and imprisonment in the black community. These have included the underachievement of black children at schools, the lack of male black role models, and aspects of black culture often thought of as encouraging criminal behaviour. An important factor is that young people of all groups are more likely to commit crime; the black population is significantly younger than the general population.

This is not to say that if you are of one race you are more prone to criminal behaviour... not at all! The majority of criminal behaviour links to the individuals background (i.e. social class and locality) and there are many reasons to why this is true. Most ethnic groups in the United Kingdom have a higher unemployment level than white people, as I have already discussed, it produces a greater temptation for crime.⁸ Consequently more ethnic groups live in inner city areas which may be drawn into a culture of criminality, they come from lower classes and are therefore not as privileged. Many of these lower class families are headed by a single parent. Ethnic families therefore have a greater chance of lacking a father figure.

Conclusion

Crimes happen every single day. From my research I have concluded that when investigating the relationship between gender and criminal behaviour, women commit fewer crimes than men but men commit more violent crimes. When investigating the relationship between social class and criminal behaviour, blue-collar workers commit the majority of crimes. Although white-collar workers also commit crimes, most are undetected. When investigating the relationship between locality and criminal behaviour, most crimes are committed in urban areas. And when investigating the relationship between ethnicity and criminal behaviour it was found that the African community were most known to commit knife and gun crimes. However, we cannot generalise these results to the rest of the population, as there are many more factors which contribute to criminal behaviour.

⁶ BBC. 2009. *A Truth about Crime: Violent Crime* [Online]. Available at: www.bbc.co.uk/truthaboutcrime/stories/violent_crime.shtml [Accessed 30 September 11]

⁷ FPWP. 2010. *Race, Ethnicity and Crime* [Online]. Available at: www.fpwphibiscus.org.uk/?p=291 [Accessed 21 September 11]

⁸ NSW. 1998. *Ethnicity and Crime under Microscope* [Online]. Available at: www.crc.nsw.gov.au/publications/documents/speeches/documents/ethnicity [Accessed 21 September 11]

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