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**Joseph Rowntree Foundation**

**Anti-Poverty Strategies for  
the UK**

# **Poverty and Crime Review**

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## Introduction

### Aims

This review of the literature about how and why poverty and crime influence one another, and the benefits to crime reduction of reducing poverty, looks at the implications for practical policies and strategies.

### Methods

The review gathered and reviewed 173 of the most cited and/or important articles and monographs published mostly between 1980 and 2013 that directly or indirectly tested the poverty and crime (P-C) link in the United States, United Kingdom and Europe. The start date 1980 reflects a growing interest in the impact of poverty on crime, coinciding with steep rises of poverty and unemployment at a time that began to see steep rises in the crime rate too.

In marshalling studies about crime and poverty, various methodological and substantive blind-spots in the criminological literature needed to be taken into account and overcome. Large national studies of poverty and crime in Britain, like studies of crime and class, are absent, despite a widespread *impression* that crime is prevalent among the poor and lower social classes. In Britain, neither criminal nor prison statistics control for poverty or socioeconomic status, made all the more remarkable when proxies for poverty such as employment status at arrest and conviction are taken into account, which show the majority of those arrested and imprisoned having experienced poverty. Further, changes in British Crime Survey (BCS) sampling and changes in the availability of data have made analysis of the impact of poverty on crime impossible.<sup>1</sup>

The overall method was to triangulate different approaches, methods and data so that the weaknesses of one might be compensated by the strengths of another. To discover what the cumulative effects of growing up poor might be on engaging in criminal activity we gathered studies that looked at processes of persistent or recurring childhood and family poverty, linked to crime, using longitudinal cohort studies.

Associations, correlations and causes in poverty-crime relationships were sort using cohort and time series data as well as cross sectional studies. As Valdez et al (2007:595) tell us, any poverty and crime link ‘...involves a complex interrelationship among mediating individual and community-level variables’.

Another aspect of our methods was to capture the different levels and scales of data and analysis – individual, household and neighbourhood – in poverty and crime relationships. We looked at smaller, local studies as well as national studies using aggregate data. Finally we examined quantitative and qualitative approaches to the impact of poverty on crime.

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<sup>1</sup> In favour of using the BCS as a tool for the performance management and accountability of the criminal justice system, particularly police area performance.

## Scope

The studies were organised into dimensions and themes reflecting the range of substantive issues and research interests that emerge from studying the impact of poverty on crime. The different dimensions of the relationship between poverty and crime are dynamic and complex in that they relate to: age, the life span and life transitions; gender and poverty seen in the strong link between women's poverty and their offending and victimisation; the relationship between income poverty, parental stress and onset of childhood and teenage offending; the neighbourhood effects of area poverty and crime; the importance of feelings and perceptions of relative poverty in engendering discord and violence; the different relationships of poverty to violent and property crime; the significance of macroeconomic trends such as recession and crime; that poor and insecure work can have as adverse an influence as unemployment on criminal proclivities; and the adverse influence of changes in public, welfare and criminal justice policy on attempts to desist from crime and on the rehabilitation of offenders.

## Definitions

To guide this review we define poverty as 'When a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation).' Further, that poverty definitions should be grounded in material conditions and minimum standards. Poverty is centrally-defined by a general lack of sufficient material resources, so it is not the same as social mobility, well-being or inequality (Goulden, 2013). Finally, that poverty is relative and dynamic rather than absolute and fixed.

Crime in a straightforward sense is law-breaking, or more conditionally, violation of the criminal law as agreed within a given jurisdiction at a particular time, although criminal law is usually enduring once established. The reasons certain criminal laws emerge and not others, which laws are enforced, and who is prosecuted are contested. Although some laws such as those against killing and the use of violence seem universally agreed as based on society's moral consensus, other laws may codify the interests of the influential, powerful and rich, and therefore are biased against the interests and wishes of the poor, the powerless and those without a voice. As the title of Reiman and Leighton's (2010) study attests, 'The Rich Get Richer and The Poor Get Prison'. For example, the prison population contains disproportionate numbers of people who have lived in the most socially deprived areas (see Houchin, R. (2005) *Social Exclusion and Imprisonment in Scotland: a Report*, Glasgow: Glasgow Caledonian University.)

The different studies of poverty and crime use different definitions and measures of poverty and the sources of crime data are problematic as to whether they are officially recorded by the police, courts and other agencies or self-reported by offenders and victims. These definitional and methodological issues are addressed where necessary in the discussions.

## Chapter 1

### Establishing whether poverty has an impact on crime

We have already implied that links between poverty and crime can be elusive in the criminological literature. The reasons for this are obvious. Most people who become poor, even quite suddenly or have recurrent, quite long-term experiences of living in poverty, never engage in criminal activity. A minority of people who are known to them and surround them in their everyday lives, where they live, nevertheless often do engage in this activity. Crime is connected to their lives because they are more likely to be victimised by it. In these circumstances, crime can appear all pervasive in its influence on daily life. The conundrum is that if most poor people are lawful, while most 'ordinary' criminals themselves are poor too, what triggers this move to criminality among individuals sharing similar conditions?

Poverty then might be a necessary, but it is not a sufficient, reason or condition why an individual engages in criminal activity. Living in poverty on its own is unlikely to lead to engagement in criminality. Carlen's (1988) study of imprisoned women revealed that although poverty was common among imprisoned women (see Radosh, 2003), and some of their crimes occasioned by either a necessity born of poverty or a perceived need born of thwarted consumerism, they'd also led lives characterised by feelings of powerlessness and frustration. Crucially, it was not only their poverty, but the fact they'd been exploited and experiencing violence and abuse at the hands of (often criminal) men, that most marked them out. While 'poverty drugs' provided a means by which to cope with a life of poverty and marginalization, the women's drug-related crimes could give relief, or at least promised to give relief, from living situations that were experienced 'at the best as being bleak or at the worst as being unendurable' (Carlen, 1988).

Much of the literature related to the influence of poverty on crime, while conceding that poverty was important, was redolent with other factors, such as family stress and disruption, school failure and persistent truanting or persistent street-based leisure that cemented or exacerbated this influence. Sampson and Laub (1993: 247) in their long-term study of poor criminal men in Boston, found that influences on persistent offending such as poverty, are only indirect causes of criminality.

'The strongest and most consistent effects on both official and unofficial delinquency flow from the social processes of family, school and peers. Low levels of parental supervision, erratic, threatening, and harsh discipline, and weak parental attachment were strongly and directly related to delinquency....school attachment had large negative effects on delinquency independent of family processes... we found that structural background factors have little direct effect on delinquency, but instead are mediated by intervening sources of informal social control... When the bonds linking youth to society - whether through family or school - are weakened, the probability of delinquency is increased. Negative structural conditions (such as poverty or family disruption) also affect delinquency, but largely through family and school process

variables.'

Although strong, the influence of poverty on crime is triggered by events and experiences of an intensity and duration not easily captured by the catch-all condition and connotation that poverty alone brings. Triggers change over the life-span and their significance may fade or come to the fore. Parental unemployment and income poverty, important for child development gives way at late teenage and young adulthood to the influence and availability of secure, stable employment.

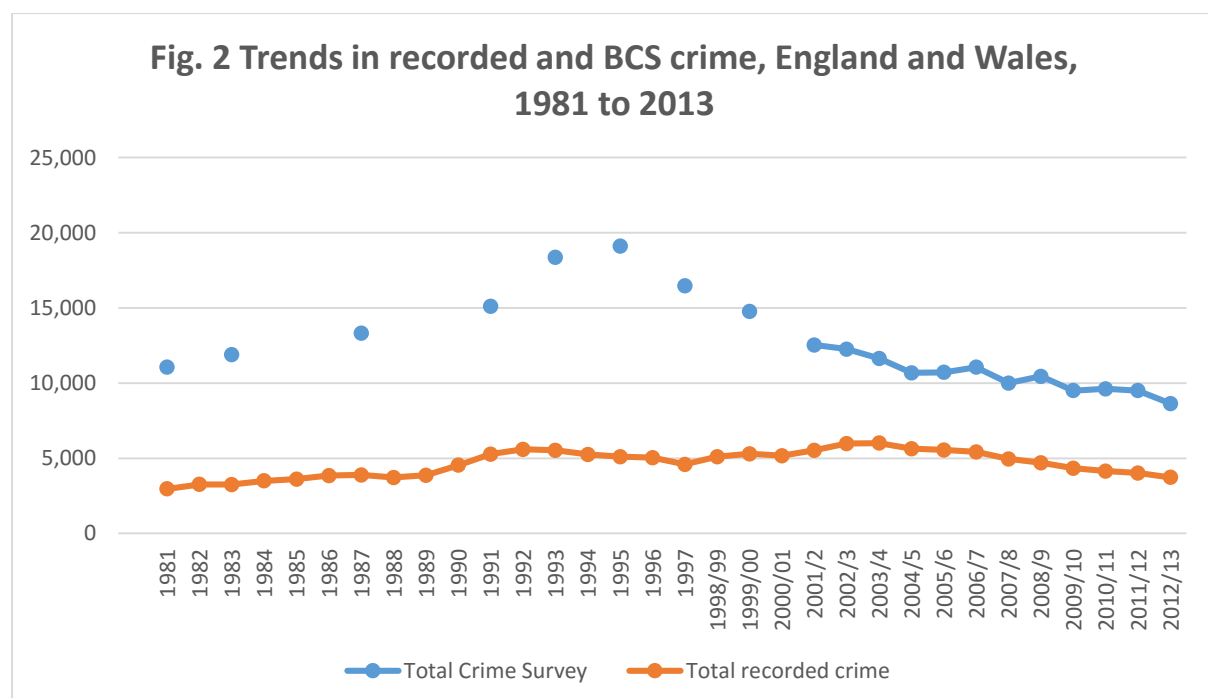
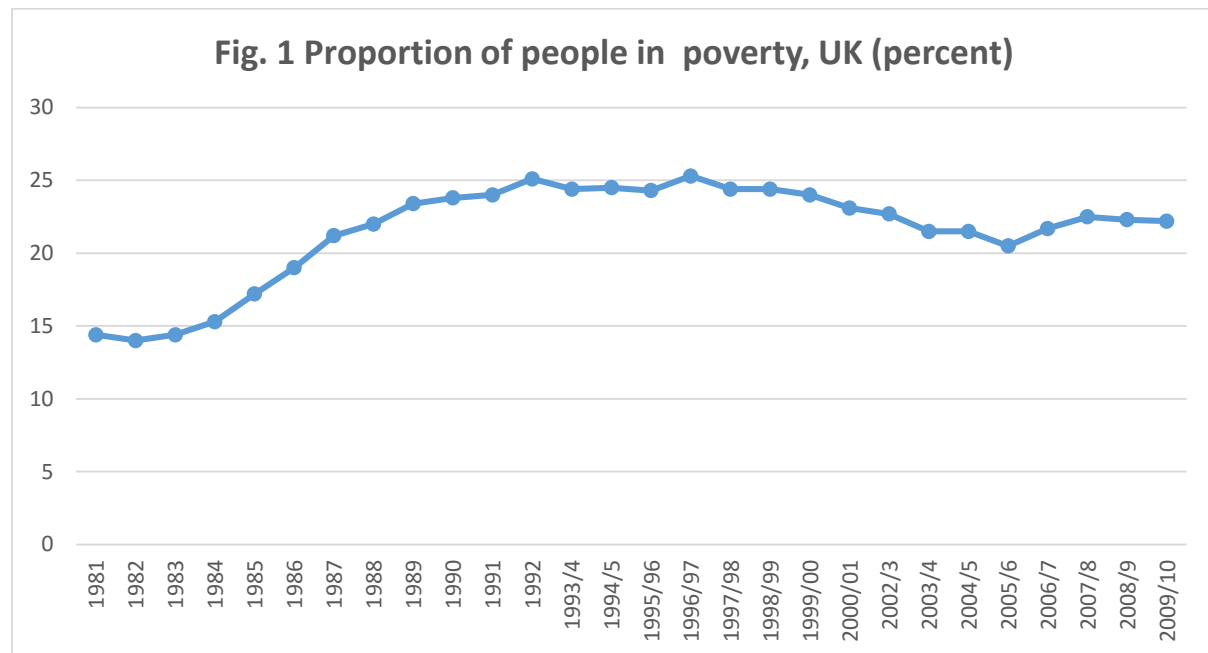
Delinquent and criminal reactions to experiences of sustained poverty are in a sense quite momentous and exceptional. It becomes quite difficult to identify and isolate distinctive influences and impacts why certain behaviours occurred and other behaviours didn't occur. It is rare that any single factor, event or experience acting in isolation caused such a momentous outcome as behaving anti-socially or criminally. There are likely to be a combination of factors operating at once, separately or over time that direct the propensity to, and probability of, delinquency and crime occurring (Rutter and Giller, 1984, Rutter et al, 1998). Poverty has an impact on crime through a multiplicity of causal chains and pathways, all of which may singularly, have a weak individual influence, but together are associated with experiences of living in poverty. Their combination in conditions of poverty increases the likelihood that a person will commit crime, be apprehended and be the victim of crime (Laub and Sampson, 2003: 277; Lewontin, 2000: 88, 94).

Moving from individual-level establishing of the impact of poverty on crime, to establishing the impact of poverty on crime at a broader societal level, trends in post-war economic inequality and poverty (and some of the adverse policies associated with these trends) correspond to long-term patterns of change in the national rate of property crime. The steepest rises in the rate of property crime occurred during the 1980s and early 1990s, coinciding with sharp increases in the level of unemployment and inequality. For example, as unemployment rose steeply from 1979, peaking in the mid-80s and mid-90s, it had immediate and long-term effects on the property crime rate.

This delay in the impact of poverty on crime is important because it is entrenched poverty resulting in high levels of inequality that have only long-term effects. The effects of growing inequality and rising poverty since the 2008 recession may have been delayed in their effects on crime rates. These effects are not only on property crime. Virtually all recent studies find a strong relationship between economic inequality, poverty and violent crime too, between and within countries, across time. Figures 1 and 2 show long-term poverty and crime trends in Britain and suggest a quite clear relationship between poverty and crime. Poverty here is defined as people living in households below 60 percent of contemporary median income. The crime trends are those officially recorded by the police and those self-reported to the British Crime Survey for England and Wales.

It is important to understand though in reading these graphs that although it has been shown time and again that a link between poverty and crime exists and is strong, the factors that make up this link are many and complex, and the poverty-crime relationship does not

occur simultaneously but sequentially. It is important then to examine data over time. The emergence, prevalence and growth of property and violent crime, do not necessarily happen at the same time as the emergence, prevalence and growth of poverty. When poverty occurs there is usually a time lag before criminal responses that are linked to poverty emerge. Views that deny or oppose that there is a link between poverty and crime set out to show that any poverty-crime link is weak or non-existent, spurious or an artefact of wrong assumptions or poor measurement. These are dealt in the next chapter.





## Chapter 2

### Opposing views

If it is the case that socioeconomic status can be a common proxy for poverty, studies have found a weak or non-existent relationship between socioeconomic status and crime, for example between parents' income and children's onset of offending (Tittle and Meier, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Wright et al 1999; Dunaway et al, 2000; Tittle et al 1978; Tittle, 1983; Wikstrom and Butterworth, 2006). The finding that there is little direct influence of poverty on crime is particularly true when more reliable self-report data is used (Dunaway et al, 2000). Other studies, however, find a strong and direct relationship between socioeconomic status and offending, particularly in respect of the impact of childhood poverty and the effects of growing up poor on persistent youth offending (Braithwaite, 1981; Jarjoura et al 2002; Hay and Forrest, 2009; Bjerk, 2007).

The disagreement seems to rest on how old or how recent studies are. A resurgence of recent studies has found the relationship between social class and offending to be strong. Even quite old studies, and certainly those that captured rising poverty in the 1980s and early 1990s, found that violent and property crime were associated with absolute and relative deprivation and economic inequality (Kawachi et al, 1999; Kennedy et al, 1998; Messner, 1989). More generally, crime is more common in societies where there are large disparities between the standards of living of its members (Hsieh and Pugh, 1993; Kawachi et al, 1994). Also, the relationship, as we have suggested, between class, poverty and offending, is forged through intervening events or experiences, that are contingent on opportunity and motivation on the one hand, and structural factors such as family parenting, supervision and organisation, on the other (Lazelere et al, 1990; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Fergusson et al 2004; Wilson, 1990).

The impact of poverty on crime '... involves a complex interrelationship among mediating individual and community-level variables' Valdez et al (2007:595) and, 'hard evidence of this relationship is difficult to come by. There are several reasons for this state of affairs, all having to do with the joint causality between poverty and crime' (Fafchamps and Minten, 2006:579). Whether the relationship between poverty and crime is direct, indirect or based on a loose association, the best, largest, long-term, longitudinal studies seeking to discover whether individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged and deprived environments have a greater propensity to engage in crime, come to similar conclusions. For example, a study of 1,265 children born in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1977 from birth to age 21 years found established a clear relationship between poverty and crime, but this reflected a life course process in which adverse family, individual, school, and peer factors combine to increase individual susceptibility to crime. (Fergusson et al, 2004).

Another longitudinal study of childhood and early adolescent delinquency in New Zealand found that young people who committed the most delinquent acts were those who 'reported more financial strain, were more aggressive, were more alienated, had lower educational and occupational aspirations, had less social closeness, and had less self-

control' (Wright et al, 1999:185). Jarjoura et al's (2002) American longitudinal survey revealed that the longer a young person lives in poverty the more likely they are to engage in delinquent behaviour. Not only was persistent poverty key in explaining delinquency, they found that other factors such as the age of the parents at birth, their parents occupational and education status did mediate the relationship between poverty and crime. However, poverty alone without these intervening factors, was also shown to have an effect on delinquency.

Some studies and writers particularly emphasise the greater likelihood of being a victim of crime rather than offending and that this is the most significant aspect of the impact of poverty on crime. Poorer individuals are also more likely to be frequent victims of crime (Carlen, 1988; Smith and Jarjoura, 1988), and international evidence shows that those living in poor neighbourhoods are much more likely to be the victim of a crime. In Canada, Walter et al (2003) found that crime rates are higher and residents more likely to be the victims of crime in public housing estates than in middle or upper class areas. Similarly, in the US, Levitt's examination of the National Crime Victimization Survey revealed that crime victimization has increasingly become concentrated in poor neighbourhoods. Levitt (1999:87) claimed that 'poor households were 60 percent more likely to be burglarized than the rich households'. A lack of resources and access to crime prevention tools can mean that poor people are targeted by criminals who know that they are more vulnerable and not adequately secured (Stewart, 1986; Pantaziz, 2000). Indeed, the long-term decline in affluent neighbourhood victimization in respect of property crime is explained by their increasing ability to protect their homes (Levitt, 1999).

## Chapter 3

### Poverty influences violent and property crime differently

#### Violent Crimes and Poverty

The most striking and consistent relationship between poverty and crime is that found between inequality, poverty and homicide. This relationship holds across many different settings—among developed and developing countries, both between and within countries. Summarising the evidence, firstly, relationships between inequality and violence are stronger when comparing whole societies and tend to be weaker when looking at small areas. Secondly, several studies have found that small reductions in income inequality cause large reductions in homicide. Thirdly, inequality influences homicide, whereas a society's average income level does not. Fourthly, the relationship between inequality and homicide seems to be part of a more general divisive effect of inequality which weakens the social fabric. Finally, high rates of homicide tend to accompany high levels of inequality in the distribution of income.

The relationship between poverty and violence holds across different sorts of violent crimes including murder, assault and domestic violence (Kelly, 2000; Martinez, 1996; Parker, 1989; Pridemore, 2011). This relationship is best supported by the evidence because unlike other crimes, homicide and serious assault are more likely to be reported or known through for example, hospital emergency admission (Hipp & Yates, 2011; Lee, 2000).

An early study, in the United States, by Flango and Sherbenou (1976) of 840 US cities' found that poverty was the main factor explaining aggravated assault and burglary and variations in crime rates between cities. Patterson's (1991:769) study of crime victimisation crimes rates found that 'levels of absolute poverty, measured by the percentage of households with annual incomes below \$5,000, are significantly associated with higher rates of serious violent crime'. Lee's (2000) study of black and white homicide over 3 years found that disadvantage was more important than race in explaining homicide rates. Pridemore's review found that 'poverty is the most consistent predictor of area homicide rates in the US empirical literature' (2011:739). Pearlman et al's analysis of US census data and reported domestic violence found that poverty was associated with increased rates of reported domestic violence in poor neighbourhoods.

Opposing views (Bailey, 1984; Messner, 1982) that fail to find a relationship between income levels and homicide rates (Levitt, 1999), suggest factors other than poverty are more significant such as ethnicity (Martinez, 1996), social class (Leyland and Dundas, 2009) or non-economic factors. Hooghe et al (2011) found no significant relationship between income inequality and violent crime in Belgium, but they did find such a relationship between unemployment and violent and property crime. The problem with these studies is often they can be shown to be easily flawed because they seek a too simple, too direct causal relationship between poverty and homicide rates (see for example critiques by Williams, 1984; Bailey, 1984). Hipp and Yates' (2011: 961) study of 25 US cities shows that

the impact of poverty on crime relationship is not always direct or that crime follows poverty. They explain 'Although increasing disadvantage will increase crime initially, at some point, the level of disadvantage becomes such that further increases have little additional effect on crime rates' (Hipp & Yates, 2011:961).

The precise mechanisms and processes whereby poverty has an impact on violent crime can be seen in the frequency with which those who live in poverty engage in acts of violence (Crutchfield & Wadsworth, 2005), and how poverty can precipitate spontaneous acts of violent rage (Douglas, 1995; Hsieh and Puch 1998). As Parker (1989:986) explains

“...violence is one of the few options available to those without the economic means to deal with problems or crises of everyday life. Absolute deprivation may also produce emotional situations which escalate into violence ... simply put, the absolute deprivation approach suggests that violence can occur among such individuals because everyday life is difficult”.

The structural consequences of poverty such as homelessness and poor housing (Stark, 1987), distressed neighbourhoods (Krivo & Peterson, 1996) and disrupted families (Sampson and Groves, 1989) leads to frustration at such conditions, which in turn can lead to violent aggression (Hsieh & Puch, 1998). As Braithwaite (1991) has shown, more often than not, poverty driven violence expresses feelings of financial humiliation among perpetrators who then feel they have a right to humiliate their victim.

Violence as a cultural reaction to economic hardship can become a relatively 'normal' way of dealing with the problems of everyday life (Blau & Blau, 1982), and of garnering respect and status, and engendering fear, in circumstances that would otherwise be humiliating, and even be passed onto children purporting to be a legitimate form of interaction (Anderson, 1994; Cooney, 1998; Lee, 2000). Finally, the stresses and challenges brought to masculine identity by changes enhancing women's position of women has led to increased levels of violence against them Bourgois, 1995; Walter et al, 2003).

Many and relatively recent cross-national studies of homicide show that inequality and homicide are closely related, but is this true for poverty and crime, especially as each of these studies failed to take into account poverty in their analyses. Pridemore (2013: 739) however, after reviewing these and other studies, concludes that 'poverty is the most consistent predictor of area homicide rates in the US empirical literature and a main confounder of the inequality-homicide association.' Indeed, his studies (2007, 2011 and 2013) have shown that when effects for poverty were included as well as for inequality there was a strong poverty-homicide relationship, while the homicide-inequality relationship was weakened or disappeared.

Kapuscinski et al (1988) studied any unemployment effect on homicide in Australia from 1921 to 1987 and found this effect to be absent. The authors found female employment to be a significant determinant of higher homicide rates. This supports the inference that increased female participation in the labour force has created a crisis for some men sometimes expressed in violence.

## Chapter 4

### Unemployment, labour markets, poverty and crime

There is no necessary direct relationship between unemployment and crime. The effects of family disruption as a result of joblessness for example, may have just as important an impact on crime (Sampson, 1987). In one of a series of important founding studies of the unemployment-crime relationship, Cantor and Land (1985) using time series data for the United States, from 1946 to 1982, found a small but significant influence of the unemployment rate ('economic hardship') on property crime but not violent crimes. Again, these relatively weak findings, as we shall see, ignored broader context, and that their data belonged to a period when long-term unemployment was more unusual and experiences of poverty less concentrated, prolonged and more supported by welfare than has been the case since.

A similarly influential study by Chiricos (1987) reviewing data from when unemployment rose dramatically in the 1970s, concluded that indeed total unemployment and the rate of increase of unemployment have strong influences increasing property crimes. The effects on criminal motivation of levels of unemployment not seen since the 1930s, led the author to conclude '...that work and crime are the principal alternatives for most people to generate income... And, while the relationship between unemployment and crime rates is far from perfect, it is sufficient to put jobs back on the agenda for dealing with crime.' (p 203)

Exploring burglary, theft and robbery in England and Wales over 12 years using police data, Reilly and Witt (1996) concluded that growing unemployment had a strong impact on increasing burglary and theft but not robbery. Poor housing conditions and the relative youth of poor populations were also found to play a role in the determination of criminal activity. Hale and Sabbagh (1991) asked whether there was a direct causal relationship between unemployment and crime relationship in Britain. By looking at motivation and opportunity to commit crime among the unemployed more closely, they were able to conclude that studies have neglected the relationship between unemployment and crime within a wider macro-social context, and ignored the increased likelihood of detection and severity of punishment accompanying unemployment.

Drawing on the US National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Wadsworth shows how quality of employment has a stronger influence on individuals' involvement in crime than the mere fact of having a job. In examining the relationship between employment and crime, Wadsworth asked 'why people work and why people commit crime', suggesting motivations may be other than alternative sorts of monetary gain. He concluded that young adults working in more subjectively rewarding jobs, having better benefits, in which a sense of emotional satisfaction accrues, and even when compared to income and job stability, are less likely to participate in a variety of different types of crime.

More recently, researchers have been concerned not only with joblessness and the impact of long-term unemployment on crime, but with the quality of available jobs and the structure of labour markets. Drawing on census data in Cleveland, Ohio, Krivo and Peterson

(2004) sought to discover the role of labour market conditions in neighbourhood rates of violent crime by examining the effects of joblessness and low-wage work on arrest rates for violent crime among teenagers, young adults and older adults. They found that violent crime among younger adults is strongly influenced by both the quantity and quality of work. Here the security and stability of work becomes increasingly important as a source of structured activity and conventional bond to society for older adolescents and those in their early twenties who are transitioning to adulthood. Work has normally offered consistent and committed connections to other adults as well as economic independence, but low-wage, insecure work underpins instability encouraging higher rates of young adult crime.

A similar study by Allan, this time looking at the relationship between employment conditions and property crime among male teenagers and young adults, controlling for criminal opportunity and other variables related to crime and the labour market, found higher young adult property crime rates to be most associated with poor quality employment. The link between marginality of employment and crime is of utmost importance given the recent growth of this sort of work.

Declining real youth wages as well as work conditions has meant that young men are responsive to incentives brought by wages, and that racial differences in US crime rates is in part explained by the wage gap between blacks and whites, and worsening wage differentials (Grogger, 1998). Another study of the impact of labour market changes and declining real wages by Gould et al (2002) found that the labour market prospects of young, unskilled men fell dramatically in the 1980s and improved in the 1990s. In contrast, crime rates increased in the 1980s and fell in the 1990s, because young, unskilled men commit most crime. The authors argue there was a causal relationship between the two trends and that both wages and unemployment are significantly related to crime, but that wages played a larger role in the crime trends from 1979 to 1997, controlling for other influences on crime such as individual and family characteristics.

## Chapter 5

### Women, Poverty and Crime

Although both men and women engage in similar law-breaking behaviours, including violence, women are more likely to be prosecuted for theft and handling than men (Walklate, 2004; Ministry of Justice, 2012). The 'feminisation of poverty' (Glendenning and Miller, 1992) resulting from increased divorce rates, more women in low waged jobs, unemployment, lone parenthood, wage inequality, and the financial stresses this can cause, led to increased female crime (Box and Hale, 1983; Carlen, 1998; Bruegel, 2000).

Women's increased likelihood that they live in poverty during the 1980 and 1990s in the UK also led to targeting them for social security fraud and welfare fraud (McClements, 1990; Kilroy & Pate, 2010). Growing female poverty has led some women into prostitution, where economic survival is the most commonly cited reason, not least because of cuts in state benefits and unequal pay (O'Neill, 1997; Phoenix, 1999; Scambler and Scambler, 1997; Matthews, 2008; Glendenning and Miller, 1992; Sanders, 2005).

Carlen's (1988) study of imprisoned women, showed that the women she spoke to made rational choices based on the options they had available and their economic situation. The attractions of crime for these women were an alternative to the indignities, humiliations, delays and frustrations of claiming welfare. Others have argued that female crime rates are less driven by poverty than a desire to engage in consumer society. The inability of poorer groups to legitimately attain consumer items considered desirable, and therefore use illegal methods of attaining them, is nevertheless still about being poor in a society where the attainment of certain goods is the norm (Box and Hale, 1984). For Carlen's (1998) women, committing crimes to make ends meet and live what was considered a 'normal' life, was mixed up with sudden, unexpected events that impoverished them – even having children – and sent them into a spiral of decline, which crime became a desperate measure. More generally, Box's (1987:43) review of fifty North American and British studies of unemployment and crime concluded 'the most plausible reasons for [the increase in conventional crimes committed by females] is that more women have become economically marginalized during the recession'.

## Chapter 6

### Impact of long-term poverty on crime

Longer-term studies of the impact of poverty on crime can be particularly revealing of the role of family processes. Poor family functioning, conflicts and emotional stress can occur in cases of both economic disadvantage and family dissolution because both adversely influence family processes. Together they affect the resources and therefore opportunities available to children and their emotional security. Of course crime is one of several outcomes associated with social background and family processes.

Skarohamar (2009) followed a total population sample of a Norwegian birth cohort born in 1982 and followed them using crime statistics from ages 10 to 22 years. He asked whether children who experience parental break-up have higher crime rates than their peers without this experience. In particular the extent to which family dissolution before the age of 10 influences children's criminal careers through to adolescence and, the extent to which this association can be explained by socioeconomic factors. The study found a large adverse effect of *both* parental break-up and socioeconomic factors on youth crime, despite Norway's relatively egalitarian conditions and generous social security arrangements, which might have otherwise ameliorated parental disadvantage. The effect was stronger with long-term poverty compared to short-term poverty in terms of impact on crime. Overall, a strong relationship existed between low income and crime after controlling for other factors like parents' education, place of residence and number of years of parental employment

Laub and Sampson's (2003) long-term longitudinal study of men's criminal careers rejected the idea that childhood experiences such as poverty predict long-term patterns of offending. They did find however, that persistent offenders either had little or no work or there was a lot of short-term work. Little time was spent in a marriage situation, and heavy drinking served to make work and marriage more difficult. They concluded 'that most offenders desist in response to structurally induced turning points that serve as the catalyst for sustaining long-term behavioural change.' (p 149). Those that do persist are devoid of relationships offering social control and support at each phase of their lives, including residential, marital, and job instability, failure in school and relatively long periods of incarceration (p 194-196).

In a British context, The Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (CSDD) followed 411 inner city males born 1953 from a poor white working class area of South London. First interviewed aged 8 until aged 48 (Piquero et al, 2007: 208) that the factors predicting future offending were low educational achievement, poor parental child rearing, impulsivity, and poverty, but that these were modifiable through early intervention:

Early prevention that pays attention to these factors is likely to reduce not only the incidence of crime but also other problem behaviours correlated with crime, such as drinking, drug use, school failure, unemployment, and marital disharmony.



Connectedly, other studies such as the Pittsburgh Youth Study (Lynam et al., 2000) showed that the effect of impulsivity on juvenile offending was stronger in poorer neighbourhoods and that poorer neighbourhoods did not have a direct effect on juvenile delinquency.

Deirdre Healy's (2010) qualitative study of the 'dynamics of desistance' similarly charted psychological pathways through individual change among a group of 73 probationers living in Dublin. The participants in the study, like most participants in studies of desistance across different times and places, typically resided in areas characterised by high levels of disadvantage, where residents often suffered high levels of income poverty and were unable to afford basic lifestyle items. They felt unable to meet unexpected expenses, where education attainment was low and proportion of low-skilled workers high. These were areas that continued to experience high levels of unemployment despite significant decreases in overall unemployment rates in the Dublin region over the period of the study.

Overall, growing up poor may have played a role in the onset of their criminality, but not in their decision to stop offending, despite the obstacles poverty put in their way in their attempts to desist. Rather, an active and optimistic view of the future, and stoicism in the face of adversity, and particularly the discovery and widening of legitimate social networks through work and recreation, were all factors encouraging stopping offending. External circumstances such as financial stress and income poverty could trap individuals into a subjective perception they had no alternatives other than crime to achieve their goals, rather than the fact of poverty itself. Creating new selves through pro-social activities, was nevertheless, incumbent on favourable circumstances, such as a high availability of employment opportunities.

The Sheffield Pathways Out of Crime Study (SPOOCS) found that the main obstacles to desisting from crime among their sample of 20-year-old persistent offenders were typically, having left school with no qualifications and having no job of any kind during the year before the interview. It was these lack of qualifications and work experience – disadvantaging them in the employment market – compounded by their criminal records, that meant they were bored, lacked money and work, took drugs, lived in poor neighbourhoods and used crime as a means of making easy money.

Bottoms and colleagues (2004) found that employment stability, commitment to work and the informal controls and mutuality of employment relations were strongly related to desistance. Being tied into the social relations initiated in employment over time assists desistance whereas the absence of employment due to a criminal record or simply, the absence of jobs, inhibits attempts to stop offending. Of course, cultural and situational contexts are important too. Values, associations and habits together with social context guide specific choices about lifestyle and giving up, or continuing with, crime.

Studying experiences of poverty, employment and criminal involvement over time among different groups undergoing a crisis of unemployment in Stockholm during the Swedish economic recession of the 1990s, Nilsson et al (2013) examined how a macro-structural economic crisis at a particular time influenced young adult's resources and lives as they entered and exited unemployment. Based on the Stockholm Birth Cohort Study, the authors

found that cumulative disadvantage inherited from families of origin were important structural constraints on individual's life course and their room to cope with disadvantage. As the authors argue (2013: 300) 'It is not only the individual's resources that determine opportunity levels, but also the conditions within the surrounding society.' They concluded that differences in incomes and employment success between offenders and non-offenders tend to grow over time among both men and women, and that this is predicted by cumulative disadvantage and further polarized and exacerbated by the unemployment crisis. The unemployment crisis was felt most severely by those with the lowest level of resources and the most structural constraints due to their criminal involvement, whose 'life success' was curtailed by events outside their control.

Hallsten and colleagues (2013) using Swedish cohort data to follow the children of immigrants and native Swedes living in Stockholm up to their thirties, concluded that ethnicity and culture are unlikely to be a strong cause of crime among immigrants. Rather, the majority of the gap in crime was accounted for by parental socio-economic resources and neighbourhood segregation (itself an expression of economic disadvantage). Another longitudinal study of a group of high-offending Dutch men and women institutionalized in a juvenile justice institution in the 1990s, addressed the impact of unemployment on crime over time. They consistently show that employment reduced the number of convictions for both men and women. The longer that the men were employed the lesser the convictions for men but not women (Verbruggen et al, 2012).

An ongoing longitudinal study in Scotland (McAra and McVie, 2010) – the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime (ESYTC) – has argued that the Scottish Youth Justice System address that serious youth offending is linked to a broad range of vulnerabilities and social adversity found among children and young people. In discussing Scottish Juvenile Justice Policy this is 'about building community capacity to provide a supportive environment for children and families...// ...and community membership for children and families is heavily conditional upon making *responsible* choices' (p 183).

The Edinburgh study found that for girls in particular, coming from a socially deprived background (parents in manual work or unemployed) lay the conditions for, and joined other vulnerabilities, as well as other factors such as weakened social bonds seen in poor parenting and school failure, that differentiating violent and non-violent young people. They concluded (against adverse early prediction and intervention) that there is a danger that early targeting of children and families may serve to label and stigmatize these individuals and thereby create a self-fulfilling prophecy. The overall implications for *policy* are clear and the Edinburgh study,

'...favours a holistic approach to young people in conflict with the law: one which explicitly recognizes that the most challenging young people in our society are those who require the most nurturing...// ...youngsters who are warned or charged but have no further contact with the juvenile justice system have better outcomes than those sucked furthest into the system. Indeed the findings suggest that doing nothing in some cases is better than doing something in terms of effecting

reductions in serious offending... // ...to develop interventions that are proportionate to need but which also operate on the principle of maximum diversion.' (p 200)

## Chapter 7

### Poverty and neighbourhood impacts on crime

People living in poor neighbourhoods are generally more likely to be the victims and/or perpetrators of crime. Research into the persistent effects of disadvantaged neighbourhoods on criminality, regardless of who lived in them, as both outcome and cause of 'multiple, interlocking social problems' is extensive and well known (Valdez et al 2007: 602; Kawachi et al, 1999). The most persistent and powerful finding in this research is that areas with high homicide rates are those with high levels of economic disadvantage, suggesting a causal relationship between poverty and homicide (Lee, 2000; Messner and Tardiff, 1986; Stretesky et al, 2007). Findings about the impact of poverty on other sorts of crime like aggravated assault and burglary are less clear and more mixed (Flango and Sherbenou, 1976; Stretesky et al, 2007). This might be explained by the underreporting of less serious crimes such as theft or assault resulting a failure to find an interaction effect between area disadvantage and crimes. Research conducted in the UK has also shown a strong link between economically disadvantaged communities and higher crime rates. Hayden et al 's (2007) analysis of 33,905 offences committed by young people up to the age of 17years and their household tenure showed that youth offending is most likely to occur in areas of social housing.

Poor neighbourhoods, studies find, are characterised by lower levels of informal supervision, surveillance and reprimand by adults of young people and children (Sampson & Groves; Stark, 1987), higher levels of population turnover undermining community attachments (Lee, 2000), and social isolation and lack of solidarity leading to the legitimization of criminal acts (Wilson, 1996; Lee, 2000; Stretesky et al, 2004; Sampson, 1995). The absence or instability of networks to ensure social cohesion, social bonds and informal institutions of social control leading to higher levels of criminal offending, are themselves a consequence of unemployment, social housing and high population turnover ((Sampson and Groves, 1989, Crutchfield and Wadsworth, 2005). When disputes occur people who live in disadvantaged areas are more likely to resolve disputes themselves, due to their lack of faith and belief in the police, and violence is used to resolve local disputes (Anderson, 1999). In turn, criminal justice agents are less diligent about maintaining order in areas characterized by poverty and instability. As a result, criminality and the development of illegal markets can flourish, as formal forms of control appear absent (Ludwig et al, 2001). Staley (1992) suggested a multidirectional relationship in which poverty breeds illegal markets, violence, and community instability. These factors discourage economic development by private interests, which allows for the cycle of unemployment, poverty and violence to continue.

The use of large-scale survey data to establish the socio-demographic nature of the link between poverty and crime is remarkably undeveloped in Britain. Studies showing the social distribution of risks of being victimised by crime and studies of neighbourhood safety showing these risks were pioneered in the 1980s and early 1990s in places like Merseyside (Kinsey et al 1984), Islington (Jones et al 1986), Edinburgh (Anderson et al 1994) and Keighley (Webster 1995) (also see Kinsey et al 1986, Lea and Young 1984). These local crime surveys showed the disproportionate risks of victimization faced by poorer young and older

people, women and some ethnic minorities. Tim Hope (2010) using British Crime Survey (BCS) data points to some of the advantages of doing this sort of analysis while also suggesting why so little work has been done on a national scale. Examining insights offered by the BCS he was able to look at the different aspects of crime rates; the concentration of property crime victimisation amongst neighbourhoods; the ability of people to protect themselves through their own security activities; and the role of social contextual attributes of neighbourhoods in influencing individual crime victimisation risk over time. Statistical modelling of the data revealed high levels of inequality in the distribution of crime risks between neighbourhoods and that socio-economic and demographic contextual factors such as deprivation have consistently detrimentally affected the risk of becoming a victim of property crime. Further that crime victimisation is concentrated across neighbourhoods when characterised by their level of socioeconomic deprivation. Strong evidence of a link between poverty and crime at the neighbourhood level suggests that socioeconomic conditions predict area-level crime rates and exacerbate social dislocation within neighbourhoods resulting from 'cultural isolation' and concentrated poverty – consistent with Sampson et al's (1997, 2012) findings in the US.

Perhaps the most striking finding from Hope's (2010) analysis of the BCS are the ways this data reflects change in the socio-demographic structure of England and Wales. Since the BCS began 30 years ago the spatial distribution of income and wealth as it is expressed by the housing market has greatly changed and so therefore has the impact of the housing market on the spatial distribution of crime in Britain. As a consequence, crime victimisation has shifted from southern to northern regions, and has concentrated in areas of economically deprived public housing. As public housing has become more 'residual' and poverty has grown more spatially concentrated, crime victimisation mirrors socioeconomic deprivation and both poverty and crime have concentrated in fewer areas.

Sampson's (2012) revisiting of the neighbourhoods he spent many years studying showing how little neighbourhoods change and that poor or disadvantaged neighbourhoods tend over the long-term to stay poor and maintain their relative positions in relation to other less disadvantaged or affluent areas. Based on the poverty rate of each of seventy-seven community areas in Chicago, indicators like poor infant health and homicide are highly concentrated in the same communities. By contrast, other neighbourhoods, including some working-class communities, ethnically diverse areas and ones geographically close to high poverty and violence, fare much better. This is not then simply a story about poverty. Rather it is about collective civic engagement as opposed to neighbourhood situations with few ties and where individuals are isolated.

What makes the key difference in all this is 'collective efficacy', that is the degree to which there is social cohesion and shared expectations of control within and between neighbourhoods?<sup>2</sup> Strong and dense social ties and high levels of trust among residents

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<sup>2</sup> Sampson (2012) has shown how social control is a major source of variation in crime rates and general wellbeing across and within neighbourhoods. Cohesion and control depends on some level of working trust (shared expectations) and social interaction and the capacity of residents to exercise informal social control. Providing a person perceives trust and infers shared expectations about public behaviour people don't actually have to know one another for there to be cohesion. Sampson (2012) concludes that in communities that are otherwise similar in composition, those with higher levels of cohesion and control exhibit lower rates and fear of crime and disorder. Concentrated disadvantage and segregation between and within neighbourhoods however, isolate minority and immigrant groups.

matter in affecting crime levels and social cohesion is in turn influenced by not only concentrated poverty and racial segregation, but by too rapid social change whereby a high rate of residential mobility, especially in areas losing population or characterised by rapid immigration flows into neighbourhoods, disrupt trust and social ties. Residential instability then becomes a marked feature of high crime areas, often featuring high levels of violence. Sampson's important conclusion is (2012: 178),

...that in communities that are otherwise similar in composition, those with higher levels of collective efficacy exhibit lower rates of crime... [it] is relatively stable over time and that it predicts future variation in crime... But concentrated disadvantage mattered more [than past violence]. And I showed that traces of poverty from prior decades independently predicted current collective efficacy.

Transferred to a British context, Wikstrom et al's (2012) study of youth crime in Peterborough began too from the concept of 'collective efficacy' (Sampson et al 1997) to describe the willingness of residents to intervene and exercise informal social control, if needed, for the common good of the neighbourhood, as a result of shared expectations and mutual trust in the community. Poor social cohesion is when in a neighbourhood context the rules are unclear and people mistrust or fear each other. A community's ability to generate moral and social integration, and monitor and intervene in behaviour, raises the dual question for these authors, as for Sampson, what are the local processes influencing whether people abide by rules of conduct, and what are the structural conditions of importance for the emergence of these processes?

The study found that young people's involvement in crime was linked to reductions in cohesion and control due to the isolation that fear of crime encourages, coupled with residential instability (changes in the population) on the one hand, and social disadvantage on the other, two sides of the same coin, that generate high concentrations of crime. Area disadvantage and crime rates have a robust relationship for more serious crimes and violence, but not property crimes. The Peterborough Study found area disadvantage to be very strongly related to disorder, violence and vandalism but not so strongly related to drug dealing and prostitution (which tended to occur in the city centre anyway), and only moderately related to car crime and burglary.

The findings clearly demonstrate that poor social cohesion depends on social disadvantage (2012: 206). Wikstrom and colleagues (2012) conclude that poor collective efficacy was strongly related to area variations in disadvantage and family disruption (i.e. single-parent households) and that crime and disorder were more common in areas with higher levels of population disadvantage, and the effects of social disadvantage on crime appeared to be mediated through their influence on poor collective efficacy.<sup>3</sup>

Dekeseredy and colleagues (2003) set out to directly discover the relationship between joblessness, concentrated poverty and crime in six Canadian public housing estates. As has been the case in many other advanced western societies in recent decades, and especially in

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<sup>3</sup> 'All in all, the findings indicate that crime events tend to be most frequent in areas in which the (law-relevant) moral context is the weakest that is in areas where residents lack trust and, therefore, are reluctant to intervene when they observe breaches of common rules of conduct. ' (p 207)

the United States, Canadian concentrated urban family poverty has increased markedly. The reasons the authors site are familiar despite some national variations: the rise of the 'precarious' workforce; people who can, moving from poor or declining urban communities leaving poorer members behind; transnational corporations moving operations to lower waged developing countries; the move of employment to the suburbs; replacement of routine tasks by new technology; and the shift from a manufacturing to a service-based economy (p 8).

Consistent with some of the other arguments in this review, the most important single cause generating increasing levels of poverty is the growth of in-work poverty and the low-pay, no-pay cycle. According to the authors, by the late 1990s, over half of Canadian adult workers (6.7 million) were in employment situations that could be characterised as low waged and/or insecure.

It is in this context the authors argue that crime is an 'individualistic' response to relative deprivation, by which they mean when poverty is experienced as unfair when compared to someone else better off, generating discontent. In a rudimentary sense poverty is linked to crime when rising crime rates fuel fear of crime, which in turn isolates, segregates and excludes people perceived as residing in high crime areas, and there gathers a more general avoidance of public space. As we have seen elsewhere in this review, not every study has found a relationship between poverty and property and violent crime in urban areas. While not underestimating some of the methodological problems in uncovering this link, Dekeseredy et al (2003: 14) are confident these have been sufficiently overcome to be able to conclude from their review of the literature, and from their own empirical study, 'that urban poverty and joblessness are major determinants of urban crime.'

A recent study examining the importance of neighbourhood impact in explaining violence in London, used Sampson's work in the United States on the relationship between area concentrated disadvantage and crime. Sutherland (2013) assessed whether shared expectations about norms, values and goals, and their practicality, intervene in the impact on violence of neighbourhood deprivation, residential stability and population heterogeneity (in terms of age, race and class). Their findings – based on interviews with 60,000 individuals living in 4,700 London neighbourhoods – were that contrary to research in the United States and Europe, shared values and a propensity to intervene to uphold social cohesion, did not mediate the relationship between disadvantage, residential instability and recorded violent crime. In fact 'collective efficacy' (shared values, social capital, active and effective informal control/ intervention in disorder) was unrelated to violent crime. Importantly, Sutherland, et al (2013) find that 'collective efficacy' does not appear to mediate (or alleviate) the relationship between social disadvantage and crime as other studies have shown elsewhere. Rather, socio-economic disadvantage remains the most important and direct influence on violent crime in London neighbourhoods.

Any relationship found between deprivation and area crime rates is an important indicator that the relationship between poverty and crime is significant or not. Hooge et al (2011) examined whether and how this relationship held up in Belgium urban centres. They found that unemployment has a strong and significant impact on crime rates, and that this effect is stronger than the effect of income levels. Income inequality however, in contrast to income

levels, has a significant impact on property crime rates but not on violent crime. It should be pointed out however, that low socio-economic status is now generally accepted by most studies as a risk factor for violence.

Finally, a recent study of the relationship between neighbourhood disadvantage, disorganization, social capital and crime, examining six neighbourhoods in The Hague, in the Netherlands. Again casting doubt on the 'collective efficacy' thesis as an explanation for neighbourhood impacts on crime, Bruinsma et al (2013) found that low socioeconomic status had a strong relationship with offender rates, residence a moderate relationship, and collective efficacy played no role in explaining variations in crime and offender rates in this study. This again raises the question whether social ties in urban communities might not be as relevant as they once appeared to be in explaining levels of crime and offender rates in neighbourhoods. In places like The Hague and London, neighbourhood heterogeneity and perhaps less segregation by race and class in these places compared to US cities may explain why social capital is insufficient as an explanation.

Hayden et al (2007) in their study point to some of the policy implications of neighbourhood level generation of crime. For example, the role local schools might play as a place for crime and anti-social behaviour prevention and reduction programmes. Using their five year case study of youth crime in Nottingham, they argue that the targeting and development of support for children and young people's behaviour and youth crime prevention programmes should take account of, and be tailored and targeted to, schools and neighbourhoods in different circumstances, presenting different patterns of youth offending and experiencing different conditions.

Particular aspects of locality in relation to poverty and patterns of opportunity have long been behind numerous area-based programmes, such as Sure Start, Education and Health Action Zones, as well as Neighbourhood Renewal Programmes. The early identification of problematic behaviour from children and young people has seen increased emphasis on the role schools, alongside Children's Services, may play in addressing the influences of poverty on crime, although in tension with priority over academic achievement. At the very least, national and area policies, avoid worsening poverty and identify and target those pupils, schools and neighbourhoods at highest risk of offending and the associated likelihood of educational failure.



## Chapter 8

### The economy, social structure, poverty and crime

The impact of, and interrelationship between, the economic cycle and crime cycles (whether crime rises and falls) could be significant in understanding the impact of poverty on crime. Arvanites and Defina (2006) focusing the large decline in street property crime and robbery in the 1990s, concluded that the strong economy at that time reduced criminal motivation rather than opportunity. Changing economic conditions may be expected to produce the availability and vulnerability of criminal targets and thus the number of criminal opportunities.

A weaker economy usually quickly leads to more unemployed and underemployed people who may seek criminal opportunities as alternatives to poor or non-existent work. But these very same conditions results in reduced spending and lower income, which in turn makes the economic targets of criminality less attractive. At the same time, people are more likely to be at home rather than at work protecting their homes from burglary and yet, motivation to seek other avenues to material gain like criminality opens up. Increased motivation to commit crime as an alternative to rapid increases in unemployment and underemployment tends to lag behind these events as structures, routines, expectations and friend's support deteriorates resulting in a change in neighbourhood norms that loosen controls and dampen aspirations.

In looking at the bigger picture of structural change in relation to the economy, family relationships and government policies, Farrall and colleagues (2010) argue that the way in which British society views offenders of any age has changed towards a harsher, more punitive stance, less forgiving and less understanding of the adverse individual and social conditions some offenders may face. Also, macro-economic change has radically altered the employment market and shifts in social structures have altered the pathways of offenders trying to desist through changes in employment practices and the wider economy; changes in relation to marriage, families and housing; and changes in criminal policy and how offenders and offending are perceived and understood.

A decrease in the number of people employed in low skilled manual labour, exactly the type of employment that in the past assisted many men in making the move away from crime, replaced by lower-status white-collar jobs, and an increasing tendency for employers to ask prospective employees to undergo a criminal records check, all adversely impact on ex-offenders. The well documented polarization between the employable qualified and unemployable unqualified, coupled with a rise in school exclusions under the pressure of school competition, has channelled would-be desisters into the most precarious, relatively unattractive employment, if employment is available at all. These changes have pushed ex-offenders further and further away from the redemptive possibilities of work. As the authors argue (2010: 555):

In summary, it would appear that changes in the economy have restructured the legitimate routes out of crime and – together with changes in the educational

system – have additionally influenced the availability of and access to such routes. In this respect, changes in the economy may have altered the speed, nature and timing of ways out of troubled pasts.

In respect of the dramatic trend away from marriage to cohabitation, towards early parenthood, and especially among poorer and marginalized groups, changes in housing tenure, together with recent financial crises, make it more difficult now for young people to set up house independently of parents and family. Difficulties are particularly sharp where the families of origin do not have the financial means to contribute to the new family and/or where young adults are estranged from their families of origin. These conditions are particularly likely to occur amongst those with a significant history of adolescent offending, who will inevitably often find themselves looking for accommodation in the shrinking 'social housing' sector (Farrall et al 2010).

In criminal policy itself increasingly punitive approaches to crime – seen in a rapid increase in imprisonment – has been accompanied by an increasingly grudging approach to rehabilitation possibilities. Less emphasis is placed on helping offenders overcome practical obstacles to desistance (in employment and housing) and more emphasis placed on an abstract 'managing of risk'. This categorization of people on the basis of their level of risk can induce a fatalistic outlook by all concerned rather than helping them to stop offending and removing the obstacles to reintegration. The implications for social policy, according to the authors is to develop the 'capabilities' of individuals who would, if they could, stop offending. That poverty can preclude such choices and possibilities is most marked where economically marginalized groups are made to feel shame, *because* they are in severe material need.

Farrall and Hay (2010) point to the profoundly altered changes of the policy context in which crime in Britain increased, seen in the radical reform in welfare, education, housing and employment policy, and the strengthening link between unemployment and crime between 1950 and 2006. They point to how the thrust of 1980s housing policy reform led to a steep increase in the rate of inner-urban crime, through the concentration and ghettoization of myriad social and personal problems in the residuum of remaining social/public housing estates or areas of estate, as the better housing was privatized. While social security reform, too, has been linked to changes in the crime rate.

Farrall and Jennings (2012) directly link changes in the economy to changes in crime in their historical analysis of welfare and justice reform. More generally the literature suggests that lagging and coincident indicators of economic conditions, such as unemployment rate, income inequality, GDP and consumer sentiment, contribute to increased rates of property crime either through producing need and hence criminal motivation, or through the relative availability of 'stealable' goods and commodities. The impact of economic conditions on crime are shown by the author's own time series data. Rising unemployment and income inequality from the 1980s onwards until the mid-1990s corresponded to long-term patterns of change in the national rate of property crime, which after steep rises, peaked in the mid-1990s, and also coincided over the whole period with sharp increases in the level of unemployment and inequality. Most recently, it is the growth of poor and insecure work

brought by changes in the labour market that may have had a greater impact on crime rates (Hale 1999, 2012).

Farrall and Jennings (2012: 481) conclude that 'Changes in national crime rates (and in particular property crimes, representing a large proportion of the overall level of crime) can be linked to economic causes.' Further, Farrall et al (2014: 22) recently concluded that,

...there is no denying that there was an overall rise in crime throughout the 1980s and into the first half of the 1990s. So whilst crime was rising before 1979, the rate of increase picked up after the early 1980s and further accelerated in the early 1990s. The steepest rises were in property offences and occurred during the 1980s and early 1990s, coinciding with sharp increases in the level of unemployment and inequality.

Finally arguing that shifts in crime policies in the mid-1990s were the outcomes of changes which can be traced in various ways back to seemingly unrelated policy domains, for example, how housing policies, or social security, or unemployment might impact on crime rates. In effect an earlier concern with increasing welfare spending and alleviating poverty was inversely replaced by a concern to increase law and order spending, over the whole period from 1983 to 2010. Changes in economic and industrial relations policies directly and indirectly led to dramatic increases in crime.

## Chapter 9

### Poverty and crime costs

If UK inequality was reduced to the median level seen in the developed OECD countries, a more equal UK could expect 37 per cent fewer people being imprisoned each year saving £1 billion, and 33 per cent fewer murders each year, saving £678 million. According to the 'Equality Trust' (2014) the UK has the second highest level of inequality of developed OECD countries after the US. The overall cost of inequality to the UK is estimated as equivalent to £39 billion per year. There are also negative effects of inequality and neutral effects of redistribution on economic growth so difficult to rectify (IMF, 2014). At national level for each of the nations that make up the United Kingdom, it has been estimated that violence alone costs the Scottish economy £3 billion each year in healthcare, law enforcement and lost productivity.

The Home Office estimated the total cost of crime against individuals and households to be £36.2 billion, per year, in 2003-04. This figure referred to a range of crimes committed by both young and adult offenders, and included all offences, not just those that are recorded by the police. The costs to the youth justice system alone have been studied in detail over time. The Ministry of Justice (2011) examined the offending behaviour of 83,000 known young offenders for the period 2000 to 2009, concluding that, on average, each young offender costs £8,000, per year, to the criminal justice system. Each of the most costly 10 percent of this cohort costs £29,000. These estimates included the costs of police, courts, offender management teams, and custody and excluded societal costs.

For example, the total cost to the country of police and justice for young offenders in 2007-8, was approximately £4 billion annually, of which 70% was spent on policing. The estimated cost of jailing one young offender to the state in 2009 was £55,000 in a Young Offender Institute, £206,000 in a Secure Children's Home, and £76,000 average across all accommodation. These figures are likely to underestimate the real costs and these figures are disputed. The costs and benefits from incapacitation, future criminal and employment prospects are also the subject of debate (CIVITAS, 2012).

## Chapter 10

### Why has crime declined while poverty increased?

In a sense any recent divergence between continuing and dramatic drops in property and especially violent crime, as reported by the most recent BCS findings and Cardiff University's national violence surveillance network, and rising levels of poverty resulting from the 2008 financial crisis, actually supports and strengthens the link between poverty and crime. It should be remembered that this recession is different to previous recessions, in that unemployment peaked at the end of 2011 at 2.7 million, and fell to 2.5 million in 2013. The question now is the nature and quality of this new employment (Lanchester, 2013).

We saw that unemployment is positively and strongly associated with the rate of acquisitive crime in Britain, and that virtually all recent studies find a strong relationship between dramatic increases in inequality, poverty and violent crime. Previous recessions such as those that occurred during the 1980s and early 1990s, coincided with dramatic if delayed increases in crime and unemployment and poverty, and their impact on rises in crime rates. The 2008 recession is different. This time around there have been far fewer lost jobs than there were in the 1980s and 1990s recessions with something like half of the fall in employment seen in the 1990s. More important still, it was the lengths of very high unemployment rates for a decade in the 1980s and 1990s downturns that differentiates then and now (Clarke and Heath, 2014). The point is it is the duration and the depth (as well as the rapidity with which it occurs) of unemployment and associated poverty that probably accounts for the greater impact of poverty on crime. In the downturn begun from 2008 we have seen a less dramatic effect on employment rates and the beginnings of improvement only five years on.

Of course, there has been striking variation in these effects, socially, geographically and in the nature of labour market recovery (the sorts of jobs on offer), with some localities returning to 1990s levels of unemployment, and many of the new jobs being part-time, low waged and insecure. The gradual cumulative disadvantage over decades seen in deindustrialisation from the 1960s and 1970s, is compounded by what happens every time downturns occur. Whenever conditions in the jobs market worsen, unemployment rises further and faster for the less qualified, early school leavers, the less skilled, young people, ethnic minorities, men and those living in certain regions or areas. Each recession hits these groups harder and from which they can find it more difficult to recover. The poverty and crime link might be particularly strengthened when one considers that in each successive recession since the 1970s, British youth unemployment has exceeded 20 percent (Clarke and Heath, 2014).

Another novelty of the current recession, highly unevenly spread, is that in previous recessions, UK poverty figures always used to report a very strong link with joblessness; but the most recent figures show that poor children are now twice as likely to come from a working home than from a home without work (Clarke and Heath, 2014). The apparent decoupling of the traditional relationship between poverty and crime link, seen in falling crime in recession, might be different to earlier recessions because individuals have not remained unemployed once recovery came. Despite government welfare policy since, poverty in Britain actually *fell* through the initial stages of the 2008 recession, in part because of plunging average incomes. When the recession hit between 2008 and 2010, absolute poverty in Britain remained stable compared to any other major western country, in part because of Britain's system of family tax credits (Clarke and Heath, 2014). It was only

after 2010 and with the arrival of the Coalition's 'austerity' policies that conditions for the poor became much harder (see Schui, 2014; Blyth, 2013).

We began this report agreeing with Goulden (2013) that poverty is first and foremost about a general lack of sufficient material resources. Money then, matters. Work, security and the avoidance of poverty should then be a central plank of macroeconomic policy. It is to such policy we will need to turn, including and especially, well-designed employment programmes for young people, despite the history of their poor implementation and failure in Britain. It is to the policy implications that we now turn.

## **Chapter 11: Policy implications: mutual benefits of poverty and crime reduction and prevention**

Pantazis' (2006) has analysed the comprehensive Millennium Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) Survey and shown that peoples' experiences of crime victimisation and the ensuing unequal risks of crime and social harm is highly determined by the impact of their status as poor and living in poor neighbourhoods. Therefore, the depth and long-term nature of the impact of poverty on crime needs to be acknowledged by policy makers.

Welsh and Farrington (2007; also see Piquero et al, 2007) have long argued on the basis of numerous studies – most notably the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development – that convincing research evidence exists to support a policy of saving children from a life of crime by intervening early in childhood to tackle key risk factors. An important level at which early risk factors operate is environments characterised by poverty (mediated, as we have shown, through individual, family, school and neighbourhood processes). Crime prevention then should address prevention at these levels in conditions of poverty.

Fergusson et al (2004:964) suggest that effective policies to address linkages between poverty and crime will require interventions that:

- Reduce the exposure of poorer children to adverse family environments;
- Intervene early to address the development of early conduct problems; and
- Act to mitigate the effects of exposure to deviant peer groups.

According to Fergusson et al (2004), it is likely that the most effective approach will be a multi-levelled strategy that combines population-level change in factors such as unemployment, family income and housing with targeted interventions designed to meet the needs of at-risk children and their families who are disproportionately represented in poorer groups.

Crime prevention policy that at some level addresses poverty has in the past demonstrated that early intervention can work (Blyth and Soloman, 2009). The early intervention programmes directed specifically at children and young people were developed by the Youth Justice Board (YJB). These risk-based early intervention strategies identified children on the cusp of crime. At the same time Sure Start was rolled out to provide early intervention support for families with preschool children living in deprived neighbourhoods, while material support was offered through family tax credits and other welfare transfers and fiscal measures to support poor families by facilitating childcare and employment. Drawing conclusions from these and more explicitly crime prevention policies we can perhaps retrospectively conclude that the key to their effectiveness and success requires the following conditions (see Blyrh and Soloman, 2009):

- Early intervention in children's services has incalculable long-term benefits for child development and support for parents, including being linked to effectively preventing later youth offending;
- Linking an early intervention strategy using children's services, universal childcare, family intervention programmes, parenting programmes, Sure Start and Youth

Inclusion programmes should see a well-funded, inclusive and seamless series of interventions to ensure our children and young people are nourished and flourish.

- This requires that these services are local, informal, proactive and resistant to being bunkered in parochial professional bunkers.
- Implementation is everything. This has to be first and foremost about children's and young people's emotional, educational and social development. For example, Children's centres should be based on their use by local children and families, not meeting places for family social workers or welfare professionals; Sure Start's promise of affordable or free childcare in poor communities based on child development and the best pre-school practices was never fully realised because these required long-term planning and investment in a properly trained, qualified and effective childcare workforce.
- This is all about 'places, not cases'. Focused on neighbourhoods experiencing concentrated disadvantage not identifying and labelling early problematic childhood behaviour. The reality is a simple recognition that the children, young people and families most likely to have contact with the youth justice system are routinely drawn from the poorest neighbourhoods.



## Chapter 12

### Summary and Conclusions

#### Establishing links between poverty and crime

We must tread warily when speaking about crime and poverty in the same breath – most people who are poor have no involvement in crime – despite the libel over millennia that they are. Second, there isn't necessarily a direct causal relationship between crime and poverty. Rather, intervening conditions, experiences and events may cement this relationship in some circumstances while not in others. As well as poverty, other events and experiences need to occur too, which although strongly associated with poverty, are not exclusively to it. We can nevertheless state that poverty generates conditions that make delinquent and criminal 'solutions' more likely than would otherwise be the case. Finally, being a victim of property and violent crime is also more likely if the person is poor.

#### Opposing views

Assessments of the strength of the relationship between poverty and crime has in the past led to considerable disagreement. Nevertheless, studies find a strong and direct relationship between socioeconomic status and offending, particularly in respect of childhood poverty and the effects of growing up poor on persistent youth offending. Higher rates of crime found amongst young people from socio-economically disadvantaged families establish a clear link between poverty and crime. This reflects a life course process in which adverse family, individual, school, neighbourhood and peer factors combine to increase individual susceptibility to crime. Generally speaking, a resurgence of relatively recent studies have found the relationship between social inequality, poverty, offending and victimisation to be strong compared to older findings of a weak or non-existent relationship.

#### Poverty impacts violent and property crime differently

One of the most striking and consistent links between poverty and crime is that between inequality, poverty and homicide, which has been found in many different settings and countries. Most evidence shows a strong impact of poverty on violent crimes such as murder, assault and domestic violence too. Poverty is the most consistent predictor of area homicide rates reinforced by the inequality-homicide association. When effects for poverty are included as well as for inequality there is a stronger poverty-homicide relationship, than a homicide-inequality one.

#### Family, poverty and crime

Families living in poverty are more likely to experience poorer functioning. Conflicts and emotional stress, disruption and dissolution are more likely because income poverty adversely influences family processes. Economic disadvantage and family dissolution together can reduce the opportunities available to children and their emotional security.

Parental unemployment and income poverty can thwart childhood development and encourage early onset of offending. At teenage and young adulthood the availability of secure, stable employment as a protection against persistent offending becomes most important.

## Unemployment, poverty and crime

This, the most studied relationship in the poverty and crime link – between unemployment and crime – is less about unemployment per se, as a static category or status, than it is about total unemployment and the rate of increase of unemployment, which have strong influences increasing property crimes.

Similarly, quality of employment has a stronger influence on individuals' involvement in crime than the mere fact of having a job. Young adults working in more subjectively rewarding jobs, having better benefits, in which a sense of emotional satisfaction accrues, and even when compared to income and job stability, are less likely to participate in a variety of different types of crime.

## Underemployment, labour markets, poverty and crime

Analyses of life time offending and of the meaning of work during the transition to adulthood shows how the security and stability of work becomes increasingly important as a source of structured activity and conventional bond to society for older adolescents and those in their early twenties who are transitioning to adulthood.

Work has normally offered consistent and committed connections to other adults as well as economic independence, but low-wage, insecure work underpins instability encouraging higher rates of young adult crime. Because the labour market prospects of young, unskilled men fell dramatically in the 1980s and improved in the 1990s, crime rates increased in the earlier period and fell in the 1990s, because young, unskilled men commit most crime.

There was a causal relationship between the two trends and both wages and unemployment are significantly related to crime, but wages played a larger role over these periods.

## Women, Poverty and Crime

Worsening women's poverty due to increased divorce rates, more women in low waged jobs, unemployment, lone parenthood, wage inequality, and the financial stresses this can cause, led to increased female crime.

Women's criminal careers link being poor and committing crimes, to make ends meet, and live what is considered a 'normal' life. This link between poverty and crime is cemented through intervening 'critical moments' in women's lives that lead them to engage in illegal activities. Sudden, unexpected events that impoverish them – even having children – send them into a spiral of decline, from which crime becomes a desperate measure of 'survival'.

This basic idea that crime is sometimes a response to absolute poverty, sometimes accompanied by drug addiction or homelessness, and therefore literally a means for survival, is too easily dismissed.

## Impact of poverty on crime across the life span

Adverse early childhood experiences caused by childhood poverty can predict later offending behaviour in teenage, which can persist into young adulthood and beyond. Nevertheless, different triggers and causes, including critical turning points can precipitate offending at different ages and stages of life, including turning individuals away from offending.

Those whose onset of delinquency and crime in childhood and early teenage has been made more likely by cumulative disadvantage and stress – shown to be closely related to long-term

low parental income, school exclusion, poor parenting, parental alcoholism, but also the undue attention of the police when living in poor areas and the pressure of peers – can at least indirectly, be the orphans of poor transitions over the life span.

### Neighbourhood impacts, poverty and crime

People living in poor neighbourhoods are generally more likely to be the victims and/or perpetrators of crime. Neighbourhoods that suffer high levels of poverty can concentrate victimisation through property and violent crime and lessen the ability of people to protect themselves through their own security activities. For example, 42% of all burglaries happen to 1% of all homes (Budd 2001), principally those belonging to the poor and/or single parents.

There are high levels of inequality in the distribution of crime risks between neighbourhoods contexts of neighbourhood disadvantage have consistently detrimentally affected the risk of becoming a victim of crime. Crime victimisation is concentrated across neighbourhoods when characterised by their level of socioeconomic deprivation so there is strong evidence of a link between poverty and crime at the neighbourhood level, such that socioeconomic conditions predict area-level crime rates and exacerbate social dislocation within neighbourhoods resulting from 'cultural isolation' and concentrated poverty.

### The economy, social structure, poverty and crime

Collective perceptions of economic hardship through consumer expectations (economic confidence and optimism) seem more important than 'objective' economic indicators like unemployment on robbery and property crime rates. These subjective experiences of economic hardship and change explain the crime drop in the 1990s. That is, growing consumer confidence during this period appear to have resulted in very significant drops in robbery and burglary rates. The implications for today are seen in the continued fall in the crime rate.

A weaker economy usually quickly leads to more unemployed and underemployed people who may seek criminal opportunities as alternatives to poor or non-existent work, but these very same conditions results in reduced spending and lower income, so the economic targets of criminality are less attractive, people are more likely to be at home rather than at work protecting their homes from burglary. Increased motivation to commit crime as an alternative to rapid increases in unemployment and underemployment tends to lag behind these events as structures, routines, expectations and friends support deteriorates resulting in a change in neighbourhood norms that loosen controls and dampen aspirations.

### Social policy, poverty and crime

Changes in the economy, education and welfare have made the legitimate routes out of crime more difficult. 'In this respect, changes in the economy may have altered the speed, nature and timing of ways out of troubled pasts' (Farrall, 2010)

Changes in welfare have created traps that make escape from lifestyles in which offending and victimization are common difficult. Changes in housing have made it more difficult to access affordable shelter, and have concentrated the risks of crime and victimisation into peripheral, public and rented housing enclaves, of concentrated poverty, segregation and isolation. Changes in policing and CJS policy make it more difficult to avoid exacerbating children and young people's putative criminal careers. Changes in labour markets towards insecurity has weakened the offending reducing effects of long-term employment.

These changes meant that those who are near to exhausting their criminal careers and who are on the road to recovery to 'normal' life can be thwarted in their desistance by a series of interminable obstacles placed in their way. These include the likelihood of them having lost shelter through imprisonment or having a criminal or drug using record. Then once again denied access to good affordable public housing because this isn't generally available. Thrown onto the private rented sector, more often than not faced by interminable complexities, gaps and delays in receiving meagre JSA, housing benefit, or family welfare payments. Faced with employment discrimination having a criminal record. As a consequence, criminal careers are unnecessarily prolonged and hardened because positive choices and legitimate routes out of criminality are difficult or simply not available.

Economic, criminal justice, policing, housing and welfare policy reforms have been detrimental, largely contributing to, rather than alleviating or remedying, the crime problem, by far outweighing all policing, penal and criminal justice efforts to the contrary. Improvements and solutions must be found in all those areas of economic and social policy not directly to do with policing, criminal justice or crime prevention.

### Focus on poor, young, childless men?

Efforts to reduce poverty have been almost exclusively directed at, and reserved for, people with children through the Tax Credits system, while almost wholly ignoring unemployed, effectively childless, single young men. Precisely that population most at risk of offending has been abandoned and made poorest.

It is difficult not to conclude that the poorest group (those most likely experiencing absolute poverty), with the most propensity to offend anyway in terms of age and gender, i.e. young men living in poor area, have, and may once again, constitute the bulk of the offender population.

### Poverty and crime costs

If UK inequality was reduced to the median level seen in the developed OECD countries, a more equal UK could expect 37 per cent fewer people being imprisoned each year saving £1 billion, and 33 per cent fewer murders each year, saving £678 million. At national level for each of the nations that make up the United Kingdom, it has been estimated for example, that violence alone costs the Scottish economy £3 billion each year in healthcare, law enforcement and lost productivity.

The total cost of crime against individuals and households was £36.2 billion, per year, in 2003-04. On average, each young offender costs £8,000, per year, to the youth justice system. Each of the costliest 10 percent of young offenders' costs £29,000. These estimates included the costs of police, courts, offender management teams, and custody and excluded societal costs (The Equality Trust, 2014).

If through tackling and reducing poverty, and focusing here on just one area of criminal justice – youth justice, and perhaps the most important and expensive part of the system – the sorts of expenditures required to address poverty through the policies outlined below, the savings in reducing youth crime and justice would easily justify the outlay.

**The policy implications are summarised in JRF (2014) *Reducing Poverty in the UK: A Collection of Evidence Reviews*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, pp 148-152, available [https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/Reducing-poverty-reviews-FULL\\_0.pdf](https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/Reducing-poverty-reviews-FULL_0.pdf)**

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