

Chapter 5

Crime and Fear of Crime

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As well as seeking to measure the extent and nature of poverty, the 1990 *Breadline Britain* survey attempted to establish the extent to which the damage to the lives of people living in poverty is compounded by social problems such as crime and fear of crime (Pantazis and Gordon, 1997). The view held by Mack and Lansley (1985) is that poor people suffer disproportionately from victimisation, as well from the effects of victimisation.

This idea has strong support from the 'new realist' criminologists who argue that poor people are the disproportionate victims of working class crime (Lea and Young, 1984). The development of the local victimisation survey as a method of tapping into the crimes committed against poor people, women, and ethnic minorities is one of the main ways the 'new realist' criminologists have sought to take inner city crime more seriously (Kinsey, 1984; Jones, Maclean and Young, 1986; Anderson *et al*, 1990).

This view, that victimisation is concentrated amongst the poorest groups, is also shared by government policy-makers. The Department of the Environment's (DoE) Priority Estates Project of the late 1970s sought to reduce crime and fear of crime on disadvantaged council estates through improved management strategies (Foster and Hope, 1993). More recently, resolving the problems of crime and disorder on Britain's 'worst housing estates' is one of the priorities of the Social Exclusion Unit.

The 1990 *Breadline Britain* survey challenged this consensus on the relationship between poverty and victimisation. The data that was collected revealed that, whilst poor households experienced high rates of fear of crime, their levels of victimisation were not markedly dissimilar to the rest of the population. Further analyses of other data sets (e.g. the British Crime Survey and the General Household Survey) confirmed that poorer households do not experience disproportionately higher levels of crime. Indeed, the main victims of crime in poor areas were the better-off households rather than the poorer households and it has been suggested that previous studies examining the impact of poverty on victimisation may have suffered from the ecological fallacy e.g. that, since poor areas experience a high level of crime, that poor individuals must also suffer from a lot of crime (Pantazis and Gordon, 1998).

The questions on crime and fear of crime will be improved and extended in the new Survey, to include, for example, domestic violence and racial attacks. The new Survey will also reflect feminist criticisms of national victimisation surveys for their failure to capture the full experiences of women (Stanko, 1995). Of particular importance here, are incidents of harassment which are essentially sexual in nature. Although they may be sometimes considered trivial, most victims of harassment experience several of these incidents in any one year (Jones, Maclean and Young, 1986). The effect of such incidents, particularly the cumulative influence, is certain to exacerbate fear, apprehension and avoidance behaviour.

References

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