The Nature of Crime & Victimization

Chapter 2
How is Crime Defined?

• **Consensus View:**
  – Criminal laws represent the views of the majority of society
  – There is general agreement about what should be legal or illegal
  – Criminal laws control behaviors that are dangerous or destructive
  – Criminal law has a social control function

  – Hunters and Gatherers: same laws, religions, social norms
How is Crime Defined?

- **Conflict View:**
  - Criminal laws are the result of a class struggle between the rich and the poor
  - The rich create the laws to keep the poor in check
  - The Criminal justice system is an instrument of social and economic repression

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_c2p0Y7mgU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_c2p0Y7mgU)
How is Crime Defined?

• **Interactionist View:**
  – Criminal law is structured to reflect the preferences and opinions of people who hold social power and use their influence to shape the legal process
  – Many things are illegal simply because they conflict with social norms
  – Moral Entrepreneurs- Molding law to reflect their world view

**Falmouth to study impact of Portland bag fees**
How is Crime Defined?

- Criminal law is **constantly** evolving -

- Defining Crime:
  - Crime is a violation of social rules of conduct that are expressed in written code by lawmakers
  
  - Does the public have any input?

  - Individuals who violate these rules are subject to sanctions administered by state authority
How is Crime Measured?

- Uniform Crime Report (UCR)
- National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)
- Self Report Survey
Crime Factors

• Group work

• List 10 crime factors and put them in your rank order

• We will discuss afterwards!
Uniform Crime Report

• Collected by the F.B.I from data provided by police departments
• Best known and most widely used cited source of criminal records
• Reported as:
  – Raw numbers –
  – Rate per 100k people
  – Changes in crime rate over time - % increase or decrease
• Number of arrests and the gender, age and race of those arrested
Uniform Crime Report- Part I Crimes

Violent Crime
- Criminal Homicide
- Forcible Rape
- Robbery
- Aggravated Assault

Property Crime
- Burglary
- Larceny/Theft
- Motor Vehicle Theft
- Arson
How Accurate is the UCR?

• Only includes crimes reported to police

• Less than ½ of all crime is reported

• Reporting practices of police are not always standardized

• Reasons for not reporting
  – Involvement in illegal activity – “I can’t call the police – my house is full of drugs”
  – Fear of retaliation – “They’ll make my life miserable if I get the police involved. I have to live here.”
  – Don’t think police will solve the crime – “They’re not going to do anything about it so why bother.”
• “Every year since 1950, the number of American children gunned down has doubled.”

• 1 in 1950 turns to 1 billion in 1980
How Accurate is the UCR?

– Hierarchy Rule
  • Only the most serious crime is reported
  • Many crimes will not show up statistically because of this

  • I go out and break into a house, steal a car and commit a bank robbery...only the robbery is reported to UCR because it is the most serious
  • Arson is always reported

– Always be skeptical of statistical data
  • Compstat
All About the Money

Uses of UCR Data

• Contributors
  – Budget, staffing, problem crimes defined, personnel assignment, training, equipment, long term planning

• Political
  – Funding, crime trends, effectiveness of social programs, legislation

• Courts
  – Problem crimes and prosecution resources
National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)

• 26 states have adopted & 12 more are finalizing the process
• More comprehensive data collection to include lesser offenses
• 46 specific offenses are covered – including drug offenses & hate/bias crimes
• Provides data on the incident, victim & suspect
National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)

• Federally sponsored: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXfImluiKaQ

• Interviews with almost 73,000 people in more than 40,000 households annually

• 12 or older can participate

• Surveys victims regarding their experiences with crime – frequency, characteristics and consequences
NCVS Data Collection

- Victims – age, sex, race, ethnicity, marital status, income & educational level
- Offenders – sex, race, approx. age, victim-offender relationship
- Crime info – time, place, use of weapons, nature of injury, economic consequences
NCVS Data Collection

• From 1994 – 2010 % of serious violent crime not reported to police declined from 50% to 42% - people are more willing to report crime

• Household theft – 67% go unreported

• Rape/Sexual Assault – 65% go unreported
National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)

• Potential Problems
  – Crimes can be improperly categorized by the victim
  – Underreporting – embarrassed by incident or forgot
  – Sampling errors – the selected households do not represent the nation as a whole
  – Data collected every six months from participants
  – Assault is the crime recalled with least accuracy
    • It is part of everyday life
    • Not considered important enough to mention to the interviewer
Self Report Surveys

• Asks subjects to describe their past and current criminal activities

• Anonymously administered to large groups of subjects in hopes individuals will answer accurately – voluntary...not all will participate

• Used to try to get at the “dark figure of crime” – Crimes missed by statistics

• Used in middle schools, high schools, prisons
Crime Trends

• 1970s
  – Growth rate became much greater
  – Homicide rates increased sharply

• 1960-1990s
  – Reported crimes rose from 3.3 million in 1960 to a peak of 14.5 million in 1991

• 1990’s to present – crime has been in consistent decline
  – 1991 about 14.5 million crimes reported
  – 2011 about 10 million crimes reported

• Preliminary 2012 numbers indicate violent crime up 1.2% but property crime decreased by .8%

• Why the overall decline?
## Factors that Influence Crime Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Age – more kids = more crime</td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Immigration</strong> – more immigrants = less crime</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Unemployment</td>
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<td>• Abortion</td>
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<td>• Guns</td>
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<td>• Gangs</td>
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<td>• Drug Use (?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Medical Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Justice Policy – Quality of life issues</td>
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<td>• Technology for police</td>
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<td>• Mental health treatment</td>
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Crime Patterns

• **Ecological Patterns**
  • Rural v. Urban
  • Summer more active, no school
  • South & West

• **Gender Patterns**
  • Overall male/female arrests, male = 3 & female = 1*
  • Violent crimes the rate is 4:1 males
Crime Patterns

**Racial Patterns**
African Americans = 14% of population but account for arrests in 38% of Part 1 Crimes and 29% of property crimes (2012 UCR Stats, differ from book)

**Social Class Patterns**
Crimes rates highest in inner cities
Broken Windows Theory

Why?
Crime Patterns

Age Pattern
Property crimes – peak @ 16 yoa
Peak age for violent crime @ 18 yoa
Over 65 crime rate the same for the past 20 years
Why do most people age out of crime?

Career Criminals
Begin early and persist
More serious acts at a younger age are more likely to be chronic offenders
What Makes A Victim

• Group work

• List 5 reasons why one will/can become a victim of crime and put them in your rank order

• We will discuss afterwards!
Victim Patterns

- **Age** – young males are high risk
- **Income** – poorest at highest risk (<$7500 most likely victim of violent crime)
- **Marital Status** – unmarried or never married
- **Race** – African American males
- **Ecological Factors** – urban area from 6pm to 6am
- **Public schools** are one of the most dangerous places
- **Victim-Offender Relationships** – 50/50
  - Females more likely to know suspect
- **Repeat Victimization**
  - Previous victims more likely to be a victim again
Cause of Crime and Victimization

- Psychological Theory
- Conflict Theory
- Social Structure Theory
- Social Process Theory
- Choice Theory
- Biosocial Theory
- Developmental Theory
Causes of Crime and Victimization

Choice Theory (Rational Choice Theory)

- Individuals use free will to choose between conventional or criminal behaviors

- Most people have the potential to violate the law

- Motivated offenders balance the risks and rewards
  
- Factors considered are personal, situational and legal

- Most will avoid crime if:
  - Punishment outweighs pain
  - Substantial likelihood of getting caught
Bio-Social

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcaDSJ1LplQ
Causes of Crime and Victimization

Biosocial Theory

• Behavior a function of the interaction of biochemical, neurological, and genetic factors with environmental stimulus

• **Biochemical Factors**
  – Exposure to chemicals, poor diet, behaviors of mother (drug addiction @ birth/ fetal alcohol syndrome)

• **Neurological Factors**
  – Impairment may reduce impulse control and self-control

• **Genetic Factors**
  – Violent behavior is possibly inherited – studies of adopted children
Causes of Crime and Victimization

Psychological Theory

- Psychodynamic view
  - Criminals are driven by unconscious thought patterns that control behavior

- Behavioral theory
  - Behavior patterns are modeled and learned in interactions with others – role models

- Cognitive theory
  - Criminals may lack the ability to perform cognitive functions normally – the deck is stacked against them

- Personality theory
  - Do not learn from mistakes & are not deterred by punishment – low or no guilt feelings
Causes of Crime and Victimization

Social Structure Theory

• A person’s position in the social structure affects behavior. The culture of poverty is marked by apathy, cynicism, helplessness, and mistrust of social institutions

• **Strain theory**
  – Conflict between goals and the means to obtain those goals

• **Cultural deviance theory**
  – A lower-class culture develops in disorganized, poverty-ridden neighborhoods
Causes of Crime and Victimization

Social Process Theory
- An individuals’ behavior is shaped by their interactions with key social institutions (family, school, peer group, military service, job)

- Does labeling have an impact on a person’s behavior?
Causes of Crime and Victimization

Conflict Theory

• Human behavior is shaped by interpersonal conflict, and those who maintain social power use it to further their own interests.

• Political and economic forces cause criminality – the CJ system & laws are used by the rich to control others.

• Does class make a difference in how a person is dealt with in the CJ system?
Causes of Crime and Victimization

Developmental Theory

• Social interactions that are developed over a life course shape behavior

• Disruptions in life’s major transitions can be destructive and promote criminality

• Graduation, career, relationship, house, family – what happens if the sequence is disrupted?

• As people mature the factors that influence their behavior change