

### Explanations for Patterns of Crime: Region

Opportunities for criminal behaviour

- \* Greater opportunities for crime in cities and towns (urban areas) than in villages (rural areas). More shops, offices, factories, cars, homes and people...
- \* More clubs, pubs, etc. in urban areas (including inner cities). Levels of burglary, vehicle-related thefts and violence in rural areas have been consistently lower than in non-rural areas over the past two decades. However, relative number of burglaries rose more in rural areas over the past two decades compared to both suburban and urban areas.
- \* Greater numbers of young males (14 – 21 – the peak years for criminal activity) living in urban areas means greater likelihood of crimes being committed.

It is often assumed that as travel has become easier, offenders must be taking advantage of this fact to travel further to commit crimes. However, research by the Home Office (2000) shows that:

- The vast majority of offender movements are relatively short
- Much travel associated with crime is not primarily driven by plans to offend but appears to be much more dependent upon opportunities presenting themselves during normal routines
- When offenders do travel to offend it is overwhelmingly local in nature
- Even when longer-range travel is involved in offending elsewhere it is mainly in places which have strong traditional connections with the offender's home location e.g. a place the offender goes to shop

There was little evidence that offenders travelling to offend was significantly increasing compared with the past or that new travel opportunities were changing traditional travel patterns used by offenders.

- \* Ease of travel in urban areas makes it easier for criminals to remain relatively anonymous to their victims.

Opportunity Structures

- \* Greater opportunity structures in urban areas – more people performing a variety of work-related roles.
- \* Opportunity structures are related to social controls in urban / rural areas (for example, rural areas with strong informal social control agencies experience less crime than urban areas).

### Explanations for Patterns of Crime: Region

Primary /  
Secondary  
Socialisation

- \* People living in rural areas remain more positive than their non-rural counterparts about:
  - crime levels,
  - their own risks of victimisation
  - the performance of their local police.
  
- \* **Parsons** ("The Structure of Social Action") characterised relationships in urban areas as being "**instrumental**" and characteristic of **secondary socialisation** (the process whereby we learn how to deal with people on an impersonal basis). This means people in urban areas have many impersonal relationships which means they are more likely to rationalise their criminal behaviour because their victims are either shops and businesses or people with whom they do not have close, personal, ties.
  
- \* Socialisation in rural communities is more likely to involve **affective** relationships – dealing with people on a close, personal, level. We are less likely to commit some forms of crime (especially economic crimes like theft, burglary etc.) against people with whom we have this type of relationship.

Social  
Control  
Agencies

- \* In rural areas, patterns of association tend to be characterised by informal social controls, whereby in relatively close-knit communities people are able to exercise far higher levels of personal social control over people that they know.
  
- \* In urban areas, the opposite may be true, as most social relationships tend to be relatively impersonal and hence lacking in close personal ties. In such areas, the influence of informal social controls may be much weaker.
  
- Ferdinand Tonnies** expressed this difference in the basic form of social relationships by arguing that **rural** areas tended to be characterised by "**Gemeinschaft**" type arrangements:
  - These are defined as small-scale, close-knit "community" types where "everyone knows everyone else" and people make it their business to know what is going-on in their community.
  
- He contrasted this with "**Gesellschaft**" type arrangements that he argued tended to exist in **urban** areas:
  - These are defined as large-scale, loosely-knit "association" types, whereby people come into contact with large numbers of other people in their everyday lives on a relatively impersonal basis.
  
- \* People in rural communities may deal with minor law breaking in ways that do not necessarily involve the police, or that the police themselves (because of their closer personal ties with people in a community) are less likely to invoke the criminal law over minor infractions - preferring perhaps to caution the offender etc.

### Explanations for Patterns of Crime: Region

Police:  
Strategies  
Labelling  
(Stereotypes  
and  
Scapegoats)

- \* More police in urban areas means higher number of crimes may be reported and / or detected.
- \* Arrest and prosecution rates higher in cities (more police and more people...)
- \* Just like everyone else, the police have an ideological conception of both crime and criminals (that is, they have a ideas about who is most likely to commit certain types of crime). They use this mental map as a guide for their work. The more the idea of an association between young males and crime becomes established, the more the process of criminalisation begins to resemble a self-fulfilling prophecy – young males need to be policed because of their heavy involvement (and arrest / conviction) in crime. The more young people are closely policed, the more any involvement in crime is picked-up.
- \* Young people have less status in our society which may lead the police to police their behaviour more closely / heavily.
- \* Police more likely to target specific areas (clubs, housing estates, etc.) which fit the social profile of “known criminality” – places where young, working class, males are found, for example. Areas with high concentrations of ethnic minority groups may also be targeted by police.
- \* Where people are more likely to be known to each other in rural communities, informal policing (by the community) is likely to be more in evidence than in urban areas.
- \* CCTV more likely to be installed in urban areas (for example, city centres) making identification of criminals more likely.

Judicial  
behaviour  
Labelling  
Stereotypes  
Medical  
models

### Explanations for Patterns of Crime: Region

Social  
Visibility  
Of crime and  
criminals

\* Criminal behaviour in rural areas likely to be more visible than in urban areas (because there is less crime so crime becomes more noticeable). Chances of being caught in urban areas vary, depending on factors such as:

- where crime took place
- operation of CCTV etc.

\* Fewer young people (14 – 21) in rural areas.

\* Middle class rural and urban areas more-likely to employ crime-prevention measures (such as neighbourhood watch schemes, burglar alarms, etc.).

Lifestyle  
Factors

“ Urban areas likely to experience greater “lifestyle crime” (for example, interpersonal violence resulting from drink / drugs and opportunistic crimes such as petty theft).

\* Most burglaries occur in working class areas (this class over-represented in urban areas).

\* Rural communities are relatively older. That is, more elderly people in these areas (statistically least likely to be involved in crime).