A critical evaluation of an article

According to the article, "Causes of crime" by C.A. Ellwood, the causes of crime could be separated into two parts: the physical environment and the social environment. He claimed that climate and season are the two factors of physical environment. The social environment included family background, economic conditions, environment, educational conditions, and social status. He gave the details and some examples for each cause, which were not valid because some of them were biased evidence and omit information, lack reference to sources, opinion and hearsay, and use of emotive and strong language.

Firstly, the sentence that could be shown to be biased is that "among industrial classes the least crime was committed by agriculture classes while the most crime was committed by the unemployed" (Ellwood, 1924). Moreover, he cited another investigation, in which he also omitted information, that 40 percent of all misdemeanor arrested were the unemployed. But he didn't talk about the remaining, 60 percent. Another similar example is "the prison census of 1923 showed that 10.7 percent of the prisoners were illiterate". That means he only looked at this statistic from one side, not including other possible affecting factors, which could make readers see only the point as well.

Secondly, he fails to give adequate reference to sources. He always referred to statistics, but he doesn't state the sources clearly, but they looked like overall view. For example, "the statistics of all civilized countries seem to show about twice as great a percentage of crime in their large cities as in the rural districts" (Ellwood, 1924), and "Statistics from many countries are showed that 51.9 percent of all the prisoners were single people" (Ellwood , 1924). These statistics are not useful because readers are not able to rely on his data. Without the exact references, there is no proof at all that he gives readers the correct details. Also the statistics are unbalanced. They only give one side of the argument.

Thirdly, he mentions an idea by the Belgian statistician, Quetelet, "The general rule could be laid down that as the price increases, crimes against property increase, while crimes against persons decrease. At any rate, increase in the cost of necessities of life is very apt to increase crime of certain resort". He doesn't provide supporting evidence. He might only have heard this sentence from someone, and assumed that it was the truth. In addition, it's too general. He doesn't mention the countries and date. Therefore, reader wouldn't be able to find further information if they are interested in.

Finally, he uses emotive and strong language, for instance, "the masses, civilized countries, vulgar, spread the contagion, unemployed classes or tho se with no occupation" (Ellwood, 1924). He shouldn't have referred to other people with these words, which are too emotive and strong.

In conclusion, this article needs to have more detail about references, especially statistics. Biased evidence and omiss ion of facts should be cut, and more reliable information should be included. Furthermore, emotive and strong language should be changed to softer and more neutral words, to be more appropriately.