

**Examine the arguments and evidence sociologists would use to explain rates of ethnic minority criminality in the Official Criminal Statistics.**

**Synoptic Link > Theory (40)**

Official Statistics on crime are used extensively by sociologists as indicators of the amount and type of crime and the background of the offenders, even though statistics cannot represent the 'real' rate of crime. A lot of crime often goes without it being reported because the crime is hidden, often victims do not know that a crime has been committed against them, victims decide not to report the crime because it seems trivial, the police may decide to deal with the crime unofficially rather than officially or some crimes, in particular financial fraud are difficult to detect. However, it is mainly the police and courts that control what crimes are recorded and so therefore are subjected to a process of social construction. An Interactionist would agree but within this argue that everyone breaks the law, but only certain individuals are targeted by the police and courts to be labelled as criminal or deviant. Becker claims, "Once a person is labelled criminal or deviant, they begin to act in ways that confirm the label in the form of self-fulfilling prophecies."

The picture presented by the official statistics on crime and ethnic minorities consists of a concentration of criminality amongst certain sections of young males. This is known as disproportionate representation. It is particularly young black males who are over-represented as negative stereotypes held by the police force pathologise black culture and lead to a biased law enforcement. Black peoples criminalities are often help them to become scapegoats in society and the media helps this by distortorting black crime which can lead to moral panics and a therefore need for more police, which in turn makes black people feel like they are under surveillance. Steven Box (1981) compared the official criminal statistics to victim surveys. He rejects the view presented in the official statistics that working classes or black youths are much more likely to engage in criminal behaviour that middle class white youth are.

The Official Criminal Statistics show patterns (which are not broadcast nationally) that illustrate there are more black arrests, black people are more likely to plead

not guilty and Afro-Caribbean's are more likely to be given a custodial sentence. Gilroy believes that crime is a conscious and deliberate act; however, he inherently contradicts himself by saying that black criminality is a myth and the police racism and targeting is the central problem to high figure of black criminality. According to Gilroy and Hall during an economic crisis in Britain there is a high unemployment rate which automatically means that the underclass (ethnic minorities) are sacked which leads to crime that helps to reinforce negative stereotypes.

However there are variations in different ethnic groups, for example South Asians are not disproportionately represented and Chinese conviction rates are incredibly low. The Reinforcement theory looking at media audiences suggests that the reason for Chinese crime rates being so low is that violence and sex is always in society and Chinese people are open about issues like that so there is less crime. This is because violence is seen so much in their society in the form of self-defence and fun, for example, karate, so violence is so widely seen that people just do not commit crimes involving violence.

Functionalists would argue that ethnic minority crime shows the need for change in society, for example the changing of laws. They also suggest that ethnic minority groups are poorly socialised and that this is due to high numbers of single parent families. Anthony Giddens' idea of reflexivity suggests that as people learn about ideas such as 'moral panics they can change their behaviour however, Steve Chibnall argues that 'crime waves' are simply moral panics and do not necessarily reflect real changes in the rate of crimes.

Marxists argue that capitalism divides the working classes by demonising ethnic minorities as criminals who 'steal' all the jobs and council houses. They believe that materialism and consumerism causes relative deprivation and that the gap between the rich and the poor hides the fact that working classes are being exploited. Neo-Marxist Hall looked into the "mugging panic" comments that the police and media amplifies deviance by showing 'false' crimes like mugging as a response to the economic crisis by unemployment but really there was no increase and the police amplifies deviance by aggressive tactics during stop and search operations to which violent confrontations occur which leads to arrests being made under that

In conclusion, when a sociologist is studying ethnic minorities and crime a sociologist must be aware that the term ethnic minority covers many different types of people, Afro-Caribbean, Chinese, Bangladeshi and many more. This is because some ethnic minorities are over represented and some under represented so the official statistics, victim surveys and self report studies can never be completely accurate. Also, it is more likely that Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic minority groups are more likely to be victimised in crime not commit crime.