

SOC SO1053: RESEARCHING SOCIAL LIFE

Assignment 1

The Criminal Statistics for England and Wales are published annually, with regular bulletin reports in between, they are produced to examine the extent of crime on a national scale enabling agencies of the criminal justice system to tackle the social problems which crime causes, and focus on problem regions. These figures are compiled by putting together the offences recorded by the police in each of the police areas in England and Wales. The street crime initiative, which I chose to look at, was an initiative by the Labour government to get 'tough on crime and the causes of crime'. The set of statistics I looked at are shown in the table below,

Robbery and snatch theft combined: April compared to August (4 week periods)

	April 2002	August 2002	Net Change	% Change
Metropolitan Police	5,004	4,576	-428	-9%
West Midlands	1,332	962	-360	-27%
Greater Manchester	1,252	992	-260	-21%
Merseyside	402	394	-8	-2%
West Yorkshire	684	536	-148	-22%
Avon and Somerset	434	346	-88	-20%
Thames Valley	331	265	-66	-20%
Nottinghamshire	277	271	-6	-2%
South Yorkshire	246	185	-61	-25%
Lancashire	158	173	+15	+9%
Total 10 forces	<u>10,110</u>	<u>8,700</u>	<u>-1,410</u>	<u>-14%</u>

(This statistical data was obtained from www.crimereduction.gov.uk)

The statistics were compiled from the above listed police forces over a 5-month period. The strengths of this statistical data is that it allows government to identify areas in the country which need to be improved, this may involve having more officers on the beat in certain areas such as Lancashire where there has been an increase in crime. Also it increases public confidence in the police when crime has been reduced. The statistics also may dissuade criminal from committing Robbery if they know there is a very good chance they will be caught. It is the recorded or police statistics which tend to form the basis of official statements about, or about law and order policy initiatives.

It is important to consider the pressure on the regional police forces from the government to make sure that there is a decline in crime; therefore there could be some distortion of the data in order to make their police force look favourable. It is important for example to see if there have been any changes in police recording practice, for example omitting petty thefts from the statistics. For example there has been evidence produced by Laurence Koffman 1996 that the police do not record thefts where the victim is covered by insurance. Also some very serious offences go unreported for a mixture of physiological and practical reasons, and even because of a

profound distrust of the resulting criminal justice process in dealing with the victim of crime.

It is inevitable that each police force listed has different criteria for recording Robbery and snatch related thefts, which may account for the differences between the police forces. For example, West Yorkshire may have a different recording criterion to Lancashire, which may explain the difference of 31%. West Yorkshire may only include unsolved cases in their statistics, whilst Lancashire may be recording cases where they secured a conviction and where they failed to catch the criminal.

Another weakness of these statistics is that encourages competitiveness between police forces and formulates the use of league tables, which may encourage individual police forces to distort figures in order not to be at the bottom end of the table, which gives a false projection of the true status quo.

The statistics clearly show a decrease in Robbery and theft in the listed areas but the question needs to be asked what about the other thirty three police areas, why were these areas not included did these regions not produce positive results or why were they not included in the street crime initiative. From the 10 areas listed there is a 14% decrease in Robbery and Theft related crime but this might not be the true picture on the national front for the reasons stated.

Overall the statistics are useful because they are officially produced by the police and give a picture of the performance of each police force and extent of crime in each area. However, the statistics are not reliable and most probably distorted indirectly by the government in order for them to be re-elected.