

Impoverished lives - Impoverished childhoods



Research on social and economic inequality and the occurrence of crime



Three major patterns linked to crime rates

- Fluctuations in national economies
- Differences in the distribution of wealth within a country
- Social and economic circumstances of families



Caveats

- The law aims to be equal in application - but the crimes defined under the law are such that everyone is not equally likely to commit crimes:
 - Men are more likely to offend than women
 - Poor people are more likely to offend than the rich
 - Civilians are more likely to offend than those in the military
 - Those relatively powerless are more likely to offend than those in power
 - So crime and inequality inevitably walk hand in hand
- Crime is multi-factored - no single explanation ever works



Macro Economic Events

- International evidence shows that depressions and wars affect crime patterns by changing the availability of employment and affecting incomes and opportunities (1)
- The loss of employment and the associated low incomes increases crime (2)
- Social cohesion can be a mitigating factor but declines with increased hardship
- Wars result in less crime (3)



Inequality in distribution of wealth

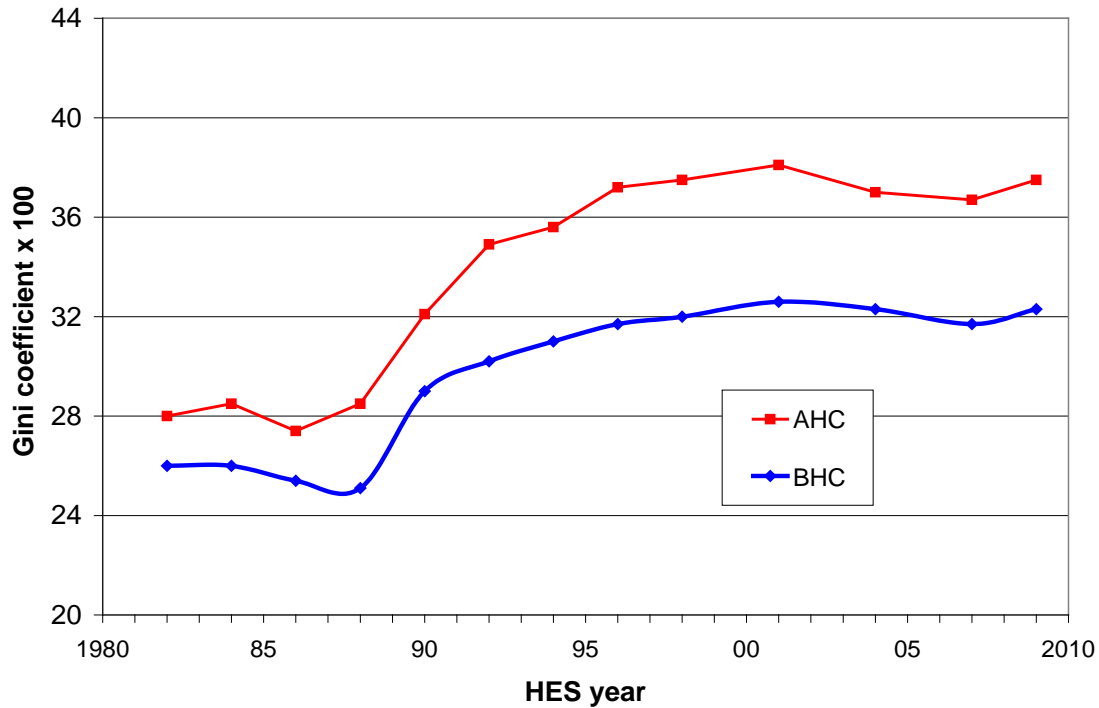
- In NZ there was a dramatic change in income gaps from mid 1980s - mid 1990s. Once one of the most egalitarian of countries by 2000 NZ had come to rank among the most inegalitarian of the OECD
- At the same time, crime rates also increased
- Large gaps between rich and poor are associated with more crime in other countries

Figure D.16
Inequality in New Zealand: the Gini coefficient

Gini Coefficients – 1980-2009

(Before and after housing costs)

Perry, B 2010 MSD





Crime and Wealth

Are the very wealthy less likely than others to commit crime?

- Crime by wealthy less likely to be reported, detected and prosecuted
- Recent evidence of MP abuses of privileges in UK and NZ suggests that crime may well be rife amongst the most privileged
- The cause here is clearly not deprivation - a sense of entitlement combined with opportunity may be a dangerous combination.



Pt 3 Social and economic circumstances of families

- More than one in five children live in relative poverty; i.e. households on 60% or less of the median income *Household Economic Survey*.
- At current levels around 20% of NZ children will spend at least 5 of their first 7 years of life relying on a beneficiary (HRC 2010)
- Children are significantly over-represented in all the poverty statistics. They are the population group in the highest rate of poverty irrespective of how it is measured. *Mike O'Brien*
- One in three Maori or Pacific young people 15-24 years are unemployed (HRC 2010)

'Poverty is the worst form of violence' *Mahatma Gandhi*



Backgrounds of those who offend

- Most of those in the criminal justice system come from backgrounds of adversity
- The reasons for offending lie in the past as well as in the present
- Their actions will never be fully explained by macro-economic events or even their current economic circumstances



How does childhood disadvantage lead to crime? (1) (Fergusson et al 2004)

- *“We found clear associations between measures of socio-economic status and rates of violent/property crime*
- *Young people born into low SES families had rates of later crime that were over 3 times that of those born into high SES families*
- *This was found for both self-reported offending and officially recorded convictions*



Childhood disadvantage and crime (2)

(Fergusson et al)

“With increasing socio-economic disadvantage there were corresponding increases in:

- *1. Family adversity, including: higher rates of physical punishment and child abuse; reduced levels of maternal care; changes in parental figures; low attachment to parents; and parental criminality.*



Disadvantaged lives

Maxwell et al 2004

- Transience:
 - many homes-- a third had 5 or more
 - many caregivers - over a third had <1
 - many schools - over half had 8 or more
- Abuse - physical, emotional and sexual - and bullying was frequent
 - About two thirds to three quarters reported at least one or more of these



Childhood disadvantage and crime (3)

(Fergusson et al)

- *2. Childhood adjustment problems, including conduct and attentional problems.*
- *3. School problems, including: truancy; educational underachievement; suspension from school; and low scholastic ability.*
- *4. Affiliations with delinquent and substance using peers.*



Disadvantaged young people

Maxwell et al

■ Failed to achieve at school

- Slow learning
- Feeling a failure
- Giving up
- Avoiding school

Did not do well
60%

Truanted often
69%

■ Failing to find employment

- Lack of skills
- Lack of experience
- Lack of motivation

Suspended/expelled
79%

No qualification
79%



Becoming involved in crime

- Truanting - finding something to do
- Finding friends to do it with
- Seeking a bit of excitement, adventure

- Cars

Running away **69%**

- Alcohol

Alcohol use **50%**

- Drugs

Marijuana use **50%**

- Petty crime

Sex before 15 **54%**

Undetected crime **79%**



Involvement in the criminal justice system

- Treated unfairly by police **24%**
- Not understanding what would happen and their role in FGC **24%**
- Not involved in FGC **33%**
- Not treated with respect in court **29%**
- Feeling shamed and excluded **48%**
- Not feeling forgiven **19%**
- Restrictive/punitive responses **61%**
- Nothing to prevent reoffending **53%**



Afterwards

- Stigma and shame continues for some
- They are labelled - sometimes for life
- Life choices are now very limited
 - Friends with similar problems
 - Excitement from alcohol, drugs and missions
 - Early parenthood
 - Money is accessible only from illegal activities



Childhood disadvantage and crime (4)

(Fergusson et al)

- *“The results suggest that the higher rates of crime found amongst children from socio-economically disadvantaged families reflect a life course process in which adverse family, individual, school and peer factors combine to increase individual susceptibility to crime.”*



In conclusion

- Neither international economic events or the individual's inability to cope with adversity can excuse public inaction.
- We have an obligation to:
 - *Make just and fair laws for all*
 - *Reduce economic inequality*
 - *Respond to the basic human rights of all citizens*
 - *Aim to give every person an opportunity to a healthy and constructive life*



The End