

White-collar and
corporate crime are
under-represented in
criminal statistics
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Crime is breaking the law. Crime statistics are measured in two ways in Britain. Firstly by Police recorded crimes and Secondly by British crime surveys. Police recorded crimes are crimes recorded by the police from which official statistics on crime are drawn, whereas British crime survey is a victim study, which asks people if they have been a victim of particular crimes. In this is essay I will be supporting the view that white-collar crimes and corporate crimes are under-represented in the criminal statistics.

I will be looking at how and why corporate crimes and white collar crimes are under-represented, and provide evidence for my argument. I will also look at different theories to support my view e. g. Marxists, Strain theory and Subcultural theory. White collar crimes are committed by people of high social status and respectability in the course of their occupations (Edwin Sutherland -1960). White collar crimes are divided into two parts. Firstly occupational (crimes committed at the expense of the organisations) and corporate crime (crimes committed on behalf on the organisations e. . non payment of VAT).

Fraud only accounts for 6% of recorded crime but its monetary value is far greater than suggests e. g. WorldCom, the second largest long-distance telephone company in the USA, was forced to admit a \$4 million hole in its account. These crimes do not enter police records because they are dealt with administratively by organisations such as the Inland Revenue. Although these crimes have a greater affect on people, (e. g. people may pay more Tax), many cases of detected fraud never enter the police records (Maguire, 2002).

This shows that police recorded crimes are significantly biased in under-representing corporate crimes while in monetary terms fraud is much more significant than other crimes. These crimes are difficult to detect and when they are detected, they are rarely prosecuted. Corporate crime has a lower rate of detection, prosecution and more lenient punishments. (Croall, 2001). In Bhopal, in 1984, an escape of poisonous gas from a chemical plant killed more than 3, 000 people and caused permanent injury to a further 20, 000. The escape of gas was caused by inadequate safety procedures of the plant.

No criminal charges were brought against the company when it agreed to pay \$470 million in compensation to victims and their families. This shows that although the affect of corporate crimes are huge, people are rarely prosecuted. White collar crimes are given more lenient punishment e. g. they may be given a fine, a short sentence in an open prison and punished with community service. Marxists would also support this view and argue that there is one law for the poor and another for the rich. I will now argue why these white-collar and corporate crimes are under-represented in official statistics.

Firstly the police are more likely to concentrate on offenders from the least powerful sections of society (e. g. working class). Sampson (1986) found that the police tend to concentrate their patrols in poorer areas because of the belief that more crime takes place in such areas. Such police bias leads to the over-representation of powerless groups in official crime statistics. This shows that working class crimes are over-represented while white-collar and corporate crime are under-represented due to more attention given to working class crimes by the police.

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Secondly white collar crimes are given more lenient punishment e. g. they may be given a fine, a short sentence in an open prison and punished with community service. This shows that due to their lenient punishment by the police they are under-represented. White collar crimes are also treated differently to other crimes. This may be because of their low visibility as when they are detected; it is hard to blame anyone because we do not know which individual is responsible for this crime so white-collar crimes are described as ' crimes without victims'.

This shows that these crimes are different because it is harder to pinpoint the blame on an individual. Strain theory argues that middle class people experience relative deprivation when they make comparisons with those better off than themselves so they turn to crime. So due to this there is a strain to anomie and pressure to turn to illegal means (Merton), whereas Subcultural theory argues that many corporations have a subculture that emphasis the pursuit of wealth and profit and the pressure to succeed leads to criminal acts.

Marxists would agree argues that crime committed by the bourgeoisie is more likely to go unnoticed, with even the smallest of offences being punished when being committed by the proletariat. They argue that the law reflects the interests of the ruling class. Crimes of the powerful such as corporate crime e. g. failing to pay tax would be rarely prosecuted whereas those at the bottom of the class system are regularly prosecuted. This means that there is one law for the rich and one for the poor.