

# Offenders and youth crime around the uk criminology essay



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The vast majority of research on youth crime in the UK has been focused on young people as offenders rather than as victims of crime. Although most media coverage portrays young people as perpetrators rather than victims of crime, most of the research available in this area has pointed to the contrary. This essay aims to understand the paradoxical positioning of young people, crime, and victimization. It will focus on evidence regarding victimization, the degree of over control and the lack of protection given to young people in the streets, the household and public institutions. Finally, it will demonstrate through the work of criminologists Pitts, Wood, and Muncie that often young people who become involved in crime have often themselves been the victims of crime.

When the words ' youth' and ' crime' are paired with one another, the prevailing mindset is that of youth as a perpetual offender. Media stories such as the violent young offender or the undisciplined youth have played a crucial role in portraying the youth as criminals. Young people are presented as a permanent source of fear, danger and in need of control (Francis, 2007). The ever-increasing attention that politicians have given to this matter has only reinforced this frame of mind. The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act launched new Anti Social Orders to be used in regards to nuisances and incivilities. The formal regulations emanating from such new laws were to monitor and survey young people within their education, recreational activities, and work. The 1998 act also introduced an obligatory curfew to all children under the age of 10 based on presumptions from authorities rather than the actual committal of crime. As a result, all types of stereotypes, labeling and postulations propagated through society creating a false reality of

youth as criminals. However, much of the research has discovered that the grounds for such high profile given to youth as criminals are not supported. What is actually regarded as crime and anti social behaviour has proven to vary from time to time and from place to place (Muncie, 2000). Since the 1990s the UK has seen much change in legislations which has conflated the notions of ' crime' and ' disorder' in regards to youth. For instance, what you used to be regarded as simple nuisance, such as kids hanging around a street corner or being rude to adults now falls under what is considered to be ' youth crime'. Pitts argues that since 1990, society has seen a clear decline in offences committed by young people. For example, between 1992 and 2002, the number of 10-17 year old convicted fell from 143. 000 to 105. 000, a drop of almost 26%. However, the ' reality' does not appear to concur with public opinion. Most opinion polls show that the public believes that youth crime is spiraling upwards and gradually becoming more serious. The truth is that youth crime only accounts for about 6% of all crimes committed against another person (,,,,,,,,,).

In contrast, the words youth and victimization are rarely seen as a pair. The focus on young people as offenders has left an entire generation of youth to be victimized by one another, and by adults. As Muncie (2003) argued, ' young people are routinely over-controlled and under-protected' (Muncie, 2003). Over the last 20 years, a significant body of information and research has emerged from criminologists and sociologists on the study of victimization. Their interest stemmed in the type of social harm experienced by young people and its effect upon them. In the 1990's, Anderson et al. works in Edinburgh argued that crime against young people was occurring

with 'alarming frequency'. They found that over a period of 9 months, half of their sample had been victims of an assault. Harassment by adults had been reported from half of the girl and boy samples. Some 30% of 14- 15 year old girls reported having been exposed to indecent exposure, and had experienced 'touching' or 'flashing', 26% had been asked to do 'things' (Anderson et al., 1994: 59). Furthermore, in a follow up study in Glasgow by Hartless et al, a sample of 208 young people aged 11- 15 were asked a series of questions regarding their experiences as victims of crime. In the cases of sexual offences, 82% described the offender as an adult and 72% affirmed that it was someone unknown to them. Amongst the scenarios, the following possibilities were presented to the sample group: whether they had been followed, threatened, stared out in the street or received nuisance calls. 62% of the victims reported not having been scared and subsequently had not reported the event. 38% of those who had been 'very scared' confided in their friends rather than alert the authorities. Such studies show that young people suffer from high crime rates and are 3 times more likely to be victims of assault, rape and robbery than adults. Moreover, if they come from a disadvantageous background their susceptibility to being victims of crime are even higher. It was found that fear of crime had damaging effects on their lives and for criminologist Hartless, much of the youth was indeed more 'more sinned against than sinning' (Hartless et al, 1995).

Over the years many theories have risen as explanations to the causes of youth victimization. Although age has been one of the main factors for youngster's criminal victimization, it was also found that neighborhoods and social status were key factors. The 1980s and 1990s were a turning point in

the UK, a seismic social and economical shift occurred and between those years the British Crime Survey showed that not only had victimization risen to unparalleled rate, but there had also been changes in its nature and allocation. It was the Thatcher administration via the 'right to buy' scheme which reduced the quantity of existing housing. Between 1970 and 1990, owner occupation in the UK rose from 55.3% of households to 67.6%. The somewhat, wealthy middle aged class people left social housing to be substituted by poorer, lone parented families. 'Old social ties, constructed of kinship, friendship or familiarity withered away to be replaced by transience, isolation and mutual suspicion' (Pitts, 2005: 243). Neighbors no longer looked out for one another, nor did they come near adolescents or naughty children, for fear or retaliation. They found that by 1997, 25% of children and young people under the age of 16 lived in such neighborhoods. 70% of those residing on the poorest estates were from ethnic minorities causing their levels of victimization to be far higher than for whites. 'This would suggest that any attempt to reduce child and youth victimization in such neighborhoods must therefore include strategies which aim to reconnect these destabilized neighborhoods with the economic mainstream' (Pitts, in Pitts 2005: 244).

Criminologists such as John Muncie or John Pitts discovered throughout their research that more often than not young people lacked protection from the government, and were in turn dramatically victimized within the vicinity of their homes, on public transports, or even in public institutions. In 1986, the NSPCC Research Unit estimated that each year in the UK, 2.29 per 1,000 children were either neglected or maltreated. They also found that on

average by the time children reached age 6, they were physically abused and those aged 10 were sexually abused. Around 160, 000 cases of children suffering are reported each year, 135, 000 of those cases are usually found to have substantial evidence of abuse and neglect (Pitts, 2005). Bateman and Pitts (2005) attempted to find out which environment led to the most amount of victimization. They found that children under the age of 1 year old had higher chances to be murdered than any other age group; Parents or carers were the main perpetrators of such crimes. Therefore, it is seemingly surprising that the authorities have not given this subject more attention. Muncie (2000) explains that the British Crime Survey does not contain questions about violence in the home. This is not very shocking considering what little research criminologists have done to expose the routine of violence. Perhaps, the reason authorities have been so reluctant in divulging these truths is to protect the notions of family sanctity and privacy. Politicians ambivalent view is that the publicizing of child abuse and the fight for children's right are likely to destabilize family life and threaten parental authority (Muncie, 2000).

Just as alarming is the number of revelations brought to light in cases of violence within institutions or on public transport. Pitts and Smith (1995) conducted a study into student victimization; one of the key findings from their work was that young people were particularly vulnerable whilst using public transports. Anti- social behavior by young people on buses is regarded as a national issue. The majority of incidents taking place in those instances are unfortunately vastly unreported. A Merseyside survey found that young people are more likely to be victimized on buses or on train than adults. Girls

and young women were more likely than boys to be molested on the upper deck of busses or exposed to indecent exposure from adults. The incidents taking place on such journeys ranged from theft, bullying, or even threats from older kids. Many young girls and boys admitted to being scared whilst waiting for the bus alone, especially when the bus stops were dark and isolated. The lack of visible staff made the children feel unsafe (Pitts and Smith, 1995).

Another form of victimization includes the states inadequate provision and neglect of young people. In the report of Youth Justice Matters- or Does It?, Sheila Brown (2000), recalls the event in which she asked a young man living on the North East Housing estate if he was happy? The reply to the question was: ' No, of course I'm not fucking happy, just look around here'. She explains that this person lived in the most atrocious conditions; his house had no bathroom, almost no furniture, no telephone, bare floors.

Furthermore, the estate he lived in was recorded as holding the highest crime rate in the region. The young man quoted was the perpetrator of several crimes such as car theft, robbery and drug offences. She argues that there was nobody to be held accountable for the victimization that was being inflicted upon him through poverty (Brown, 2000). Pat Carlen, a feminist explains that, ' Young people are victims in those instance, yet are largely treated within a framework of criminality' (Carlen in Brown, 2000).

Whether, and how, abuse, neglect, bullying or exposure to domestic violence lead to young people committing crime is a contentious issue. Whilst it appears that most victims of crime don't go on to become criminals.

Research has found a high correlation between perpetrators of crime and <https://assignbuster.com/offenders-and-youth-crime-around-the-uk-criminology-essay/>

prior victimization. A study by Kate Jones and John Pitts (2001) found that early childhood victims of neglect or abuse subsequently led to some sort of involvement within the youth justice system. The statistics show that between 40% and 65% of those placed under the management of London YOT in any one year had previously been a victim of serious neglect, bullying or worse. They also discovered that young people within the youth justice systems were physically or sexually abused an estimated amount of between 19% and 82% (Jones et al, 2001). Whilst attempting to figure out what leads a young person to commit crime, studies have found that ' victims and perpetrators often share a similar lifestyle and personality traits, indicating that both groups may be " impulsive risk takers"' (McAra, 2003). This is particularly found in cases of violence, a recent study by Pitts found that individuals may behave antisocially in response to their victimization. For instance, young people who had been mugged would sometimes mug somebody else in order to reinstate their authority and regain respect from their peers. Ruth Hayward (2003) reported that the odds of victims of crime becoming perpetrators of crime or committing anti social behavior was higher for those involved in violent crime. The prevailing thought was that victims of crime may be victimized because of their ' risky lifestyles' which makes them vulnerable. Therefore, those who behave antisocially might be at greater risk or might make them a target for offenders (Hayward, 2003).

In conclusion, the means by which the government is run has rendered young people to become helpless whilst attempting to face their aggressor. Policies, legalities, and the notion of a criminal justice system have left many to wonder whether justice for young people is achievable. Children are in a



position of constant scrutiny, throughout birth, schooling, and family life-legitimated by an ideology for humanity and benevolence; however it has had little to do in recognizing youth victimization or giving young people rights. The underlying factor in predicting youth victimization was most often found in criminal offending by the victim. Strong associations were made in the lifestyles of the offender and the victim. While it is possible that there are links between one and the other, such proof would only become apparent over time.