

# Is street crime or suite crime more harmful



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Each time a newspaper is opened or a television is turned on, graphic stories of robbery, murder and mayhem appear. It is common crimes, like these, that fill the world with fear and that become the centre of attention. The focus on street crime creates the myth of the fear of crime and although crime statistics indicate that crime may be on the decrease, to residents of particular areas this decrease may not be so apparent.

So with the saturation of the minds of those in society about the dangers of street crime, whether it be through media, television programmes, games or even toys, it is hardly surprising that street crime is viewed as more harmful than corporate crime. Wilson (1975) considers predatory street crime to be a far more serious matter than consumer fraud, anti trust violations ... because predatory crime. makes difficult or impossible the maintenance of meaningful human communities.

The lack of focus on corporate crime adds to the myth that the young, economically disadvantaged male perpetrates the majority of crime and it is this type of crime that society fixates upon. It is understandable that the public are unaware or ignorant of the harm created by corporate crime, especially if the focus is on the more conventional street crime and they feel unaffected by the crimes committed by corporations. Box (1983) writes it is no wonder that corporate crime is not viewed by many people, including most criminologists as a pressing serious social problem.

So to determine whether street crime or suite crime is more harmful, it is necessary to examine corporate and street crime and compare the nature and extent of the harm done. Sutherland (1940) brought to the fore the

notion of corporate crime and contributed to the understanding of how widespread and costly it is in economic terms. Although as Box (1983) points out that his concentration on the economic as opposed to the physical and social effects of corporate crime made his study too one sided. By general definition, a crime is a wrongdoing, proclaimed by law against society.

All acts of disobeying the law are crimes. Be it an assault or embezzlement one has committed a wrong. Yet as Box (1983) points out criminal law categories are designed to criminalize only some. Criminology and Criminal Justice focus on crimes on the streets and give passing mention to crimes in the suites, even though all the research indicates that corporate crimes cost far more than street crime There are annual reports on street crime from the police and the British Crime Survey and very little focus on corporate crime.

In relation to the fixation with street crime rather than suite crime it was observed by Fortune magazine (2002), this was after the Enron scandal, the double standard in criminal justice in this country (US) is starker and more embedded than many realize. Bob Dylan was right: Steal a little, and they put you in jail. Steal a lot, and you're likely to walk away with a lecture and a court-ordered promise not to do it again.

So if corporate crime inflicts far more damage on society than all treet crime combined what are the reasons for the fixation with street crime. One reason why corporate crime isn't highlighted as much as street crime is because of the power and influence wielded by large corporations. Economically large corporations have enormous influence over countries and therefore it is not in the interests of countries to invest in research in the area of corporate

crime. Snider (1998) The idea of corporate crime is one that is simply unappealing to business elites, she says.

Ever since it was first invented by Edwin Sutherland, the concept of white collar crime, and specifically corporate crime, has been actively resisted. Corporations have certainly argued, if they have had to face up to the idea at all, that corporate executives are not criminals. We have reserved the concept of 'criminal' for people we think are different from ourselves The US has been rocked by huge corporate scandals such as Enron, WorldCom and this has resulted in the loss of the life savings and pensions of 10s of thousands of people.

The outcome of taking these people's life savings and pensions and committing a theft in the street is the same, a loss of money, only on a much larger scale. Corporate crime has economic and social costs that outweigh the costs of the crimes that the police concentrate their resources on. It is obvious, from the limited evidence available, that crimes such as fraud and theft from consumers cost considerably more than the total cost of known robberies and burglaries.

Financial crimes were rampant in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s made possible by financial deregulation policies introduced by the Tories in the 1980s the largest, the pensions fraud, has so far, according to government estimates, involved at least a million and a half compensation cases. The government allowed the companies to organise and pay out the compensation for victims themselves; this decision only compounded the

problem because a lot of the companies involved failed to comply with the compensation payouts.

This resulted in the Personal Investment Authority fining 150 firms a total of almost i?? 5m for failing to compensate their customers. This mass fraud has not resulted in one company being prosecuted. For much of the 1980s and 1990s, the most widely sold type of mortgage was the endowment mortgage; this was also the subject of massive fraud because customers were wrongly advised. This is a criminal offence under the 1986 Financial Services Act and the Consumers Association estimated there may have been up to 6 million cases.

These are some examples of the harm that corporate crime produces in terms of economic costs to people. Another area of consideration is that of physical harm caused by corporate crime, examples such as the drug Thalidomide that resulted in deformities in an estimated 8000 children whose mothers had been prescribed the drug during pregnancy.

Criminal charges were brought against the company responsible (Chemie Grunenthal Germany) for concealing the evidence of the drugs serious side effects. (Sunday times Insight Team 1979) Braithwaite (1984) found that pharmaceutical multinationals defy the intent of laws regulating safety of drugs by bribery, false advertising, fraud in the safety testing of drugs, unsafe manufacturing processes, smuggling and international law evasion strategies. Data fabrication is so widespread that it is called making in the Japanese pharmaceutical industry, graphiting or dry labelling in the United States

Deaths at or a result of work are in the main termed as accidents but we are far more likely to be killed in the course of our work than at the hands of criminals in society at large. As a result of safety laws being broken by companies more people die at work than those who are murdered in the street or in their homes. In the UK at least 10, 000 -15, 000 people per year are killed at work compared with 800-900 murders. Reinman (1979) estimated that in 1972 that 114, 000 people in the US died from occupational hazards whereas only 20, 600 died as the result of homicide.

The 1989 figures for Criminal Statistics from the Home Office show that 576 were killed as the result of homicide compared to 514 killed at work. (HSE) These latter figures are the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) and do not include those who die on the roads in the course of their work, or are the victims of exposure to harmful substances such as asbestos, which take their toll over many years. The HSE suggest that over 70% of deaths at work are the fault of the management by not providing safe working environments and proper training.

As Berghman (1991) suggests No criminals are caught: workers are not considered to be the victims of assault, or battery or manslaughter, but simply accidents. Although there has been an increase in prosecutions in relation to deaths at work there have been only a few successful convictions of companies for manslaughter in Britain. The best known is probably that of OLL Ltd. of Lyme Regis. The company and its Managing Director were convicted in 1994 in connection with the deaths of four children on a canoeing course.

This incident was highly publicised and there was evidence of gross negligence over a long period of time. The case was significant in the respect that the company, as well as an individual, was prosecuted for manslaughter, this prosecution hinged on their being an owner or senior manager who was also directly operationally responsible for the incident. In 1996, the firm of Jackson Transport (Osset) was convicted of manslaughter, as was one director who was imprisoned for 12 months.

A worker died after being sprayed in the face with toxic chemicals while cleaning a tanker. The Crown Prosecution Service handled the case, with the HSE taking on the breaches of Health and Safety regulations involved. Crime is a way of life in the corporate world the more complex an organisation the more likely it is to be criminogenic. The quest for profits and economic results is the vested interests of corporations and is bought at the price of social, physical, economic and human suffering.

The invisibility, the lack of detection and the absence of in depth statistics make it difficult to quantify the harm caused by corporate crime. Compared to street crime, corporate crime is greatly underreported in the media very rarely detected or prosecuted but it is still maintained that the focus of our efforts to deal with crime should be concentrated at the street rather than the suite. In the meantime the prisons are being filled by people whose crimes fade into insignificance by comparison.