

A problem of ethnic minorities in society

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



Official statistics show that black and other ethnic minorities are more likely to be stopped, arrested, and imprisoned than white people. Left realists argue that black people do have a higher crime rate because of their greater relative deprivation and social exclusion, whereas neo-Marxists argue that black criminality is a social construct serving to distract attention from the crisis of capitalism.

Members of ethnic minority groups are more likely to be stopped and searched by the police, and police can do this if they have 'reasonable suspicion' of something wrong. Compared to white people, black people are up to seven times more likely to be stopped and Asian people are almost twice as likely to be stopped and searched. However, under the Terrorism Act people can stop and search regardless of if they have suspicion or not, which allows for racism and discrimination to come into play. In 2006/7, Asians were three times more likely to be stopped than other people under this act. In support of this, Phillips and Bowling suggest that many officers hold negative stereotypes of ethnic minorities as criminals, which leads to more targeted stop and search for those groups.

Left realists Lea and Young argue that ethnic differences in the statistics reflect real differences in the levels of offending by different ethnic groups. They acknowledge that the police often act in racist ways resulting in unjustified criminalisation. However, they don't believe discriminatory policing fully explains the differences.

Similarly, they argue we can't explain the differences in terms of police racism. For example, blacks have a considerably higher rate of

criminalisation than Asians – police would have to be selective for their racism to be the cause of these differences. However, they can be criticised for their views on the role of police racism. For example, arrest rates for Asians may be lower than blacks because police stereotype Asians to be passive, and blacks as dangerous. Furthermore, these stereotypes may have changed since 9/11 as police now regard Asians as dangerous, thus explaining the rising criminalisation rates.

Neo-Marxists see these differences in different ethnicities' crime rates as the outcome of a process of social construction that stereotypes ethnic minorities as inherently more criminal than the majority population. Gilroy argues that black criminality is a myth created by the racist stereotypes of African Caribbeans and Asians, when in reality they are not more criminal than other people. In his view, ethnic minority crime can be seen as political resistance against racist society, and this has roots in struggles against British colonialism. When ethnic minorities faced racism in Britain, they adopted similar forms of struggles to defend themselves but this was criminalised by the British state. However, Lea and Young criticise this view because first generation immigrants in the 1950s were very law-abiding, and so it's unlikely they passed anti-colonialism struggles to their children.

The risk of being a victim of any sort of crime varies by ethnic groups, for example, in 2006/7 people from mixed ethnic backgrounds had a higher risk of 36% of being a victim of crime compared to black people at 27% and white people at 24%. The differences may be partly the result of factors other than ethnicity; however, some factors (such as unemployment) are

partly due to discrimination. While the statistics record the instances of victimisation, they don't capture the experience of the crime for the victim. Sampson and Phillips note it tends to be ongoing over time, with repeated minor abuse and harassment with periodic incidents of physical violence, and the resulting psychological impairment needs to be added to the physical injury and damage to property caused by the offenders.

In conclusion, sociological explanations of ethnic differences both in offending and in victimisation show that white people are just as likely as other ethnic minorities to commit a crime. However, ethnic minorities are more likely to be victims of crime, whilst also being both over-policed and under-protected as police have often ignored racist attacks and failed to record or investigate incidents properly