

Left realism.

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



LEFT REALISM. Left Realism developed in the 1980s and is particularly identified with John Lea and Jock Young (1984). Left Realists are interested to find out why crime was increasing so significantly. Left Realism is critical of the perspectives which sees longer prison sentences as the solution to crime, (Right Realists) but also oppose the views of left idealists. Therefore it developed as a response to traditional Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches (Left idealists), which it accused of: * not taking crime seriously, and reducing it to simple moral panics induced by the capitalist state - romanticizing working-class criminals as 'Robin Hood' characters, fighting against social inequality and injustice; - failing to take victimization seriously. Furthermore, like Marxists, Left Realists accept that structural inequalities and perceptions of injustice are the major causes of crime. However, Young believed that the left idealists (Marxists and neo-Marxists) ignored the importance of street crime in their research. Left Realists found through victim surveys, that the sort of crime that worries people most is primarily street crime like 'mugging', violence, car crime and burglary, which is mainly performed by young working-class males, both black and white. The main victims of these offences, and those who have the highest fears about crime, are the poor, the deprived, the ethnic minorities and inner-city residents. They recognize that most people don't care much about white-collar or corporate crime, as it has little impact on their lives. They attack the idea that offenders can sometimes be seen as promoting justice (as some Neo-Marxists argue like Taylor, Walton and Young, and Gilroy). Actually most victims of crime are poor! [pic] [pic] The explanation of crime Lea and Young believe that street crime is rooted in social conditions and is closely linked to

Relative deprivation. Left Realists do not believe that poverty and unemployment can be seen as directly responsible for crime. Deprivation will only lead to crime when it is relative deprivation. A group such as ethnic minorities feel deprived compared to other groups. Marginalization, Some groups find themselves politically and economically 'on the edge' of society, through factors like poor educational achievement, unemployment, and lack of involvement in community organizations and lack organisations to represent them politically. They do not feel part of society. Subcultures (such as Rastafarians) are a collective solution to a group's problems such as relative deprivation and marginalization. Some working class subcultures see offending as acceptable behaviour; this can act as motivator for crime. The solutions to crime (Kinsey, Lea and Young) Left Realists emphasize the need to tackle the material and cultural deprivation – such as poverty, unemployment, poor housing and education, poor parental supervision, and broken families and family conflict – that are the risk factors for crime, particularly among young people. Left Realists develop practical policies to tackle crime. Building strong communities to work out local solutions to local problems, and create community cohesion Multi-agency approach, involving everyone in the fight against crime, not just the criminal justice agencies. Creation of Safer Neighbourhood or Police and Community Together (PACT) groups, where local people can identify the issues that worry them, and get the police and other agencies to deal with them More democratic and community control of policing to win public confidence to tackle the causes of crime, and encourage victims to report crime More time spent by the police in investigating crime Tackling social deprivation and the other risk

factors for crime by improving community facilities to divert potential offenders from choosing crime – for example, youth leisure activities – and reducing unemployment and improving housing Intensive parenting support that gets parents and young offenders together to work out solutions, and early intervention through strategies like Sure Start to help get children in the poorest communities, where the risk factors for crime are greatest, off to a better start in life by bringing together early education, child- care, health and family support

The Square of crime. Left Realists like Matthews believe that crime can only be understood in terms of the relationship between the four elements of the square of crime; The state and its agencies. The offender and their actions Informal methods of social control (sometimes called society or the public). The victim. [pic]Matthew and Young believe that other theories like Marxism and Interactionism concentrate on just one corner of the square. For Left Realists whatever the type of crime it is essential to explore the 4 elements of crime to determine what crime is, what causes it and how to deal with it. Strength of LR Gordon Hughes claims it has the following strengths:-

- It revived concept of relative deprivation.
- It promoted debate on crime, in particular trying to explain the social causes of crime, and recognising that tackling crime means tackling inequalities.
- It highlighted problem of street crime for weak members of society.
- Explored the position of victims, recognising that most victims of crime are poor and working class, and the importance of tackling crime and the fear of crime.
- It influenced ‘ New Labour policy. Blair’s quote that New Labour are ‘ tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime’. Inclusion policies linked to educational opportunities (Education Action Zones, Retention money in schools/Inclusion

money). Thus recognising the importance of community solutions to crime; the police, public, victims and offenders are all involved in generating crime levels, and all need to be involved in reducing crime. Weaknesses of Left Realism. - Gordon Hughes claims that LR have not carried out research into offenders motives, so have failed to explain the causes of crime. - Hughes also criticises LR for its reliance on sub cultural theory. LR by concentrating on Black subcultures use the stereotype that black= crime. - Stephen Jones argues that LR fails to explain why some people who have relative deprivation turn to crime while others do not. Therefore it neglects other responses to relative deprivation and marginality apart from crime, such as Merton's retreatism, ritualism or rebellion; Methodologically Left Realism research relies on victim surveys such as the British Crime Survey to measure the extent and fear of crime, but these have some difficulties, as they tend to over-report some crimes and under-report others. 1. People may exaggerate, or lie, perhaps because of a desire to impress researchers or be dramatic. 2. People may forget they were victimized, particularly the more trivial incidents, or forget when they were victimized. In an annual survey like the BCS, errors may arise if victims think incidents occurred outside the time period (the previous 12 months) covered by the survey, even if they were in it, or report incidents outside the time period. 3. People may not realize they have been the victims of a crime, nor that what happened to them was actually a criminal act. For example, in the case of white-collar and corporate crimes, they may not realize that have been duped, 'conned' or sold dangerous products. 4. They often don't include all crimes. The BCS, for example, surveys households and excludes commercial

premises and, therefore, business crime, shops and fraud. 5. Victims may feel embarrassment or guilt at admitting to being a victim, such as in the case of sexual offences or domestic violence, Sexual offences are underreported 6. Crimes without victims, like drug offences or white-collar crimes like bribery and corruption and fraud, where both parties have something to lose, are not likely to be recorded. - Ruggiero believes that LR pays only lip service to corporate crime. - They are 'soft' on crime, as they focus too much on the social causes of crime, downplaying the role of the offender in choosing to commit crime, The offender almost becomes a victim him- or herself. - They deflect attention away from more practical crime-prevention measures, like the tighter social control and situational crime prevention measures advocated by Right Realists ----- Tony Blair 'Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' Society must ensure that the criminal justice system promotes social justice. Jock Young argues that being tough on crime does not mean being tough on criminals but trying to change social factors that cause crime in the long term.