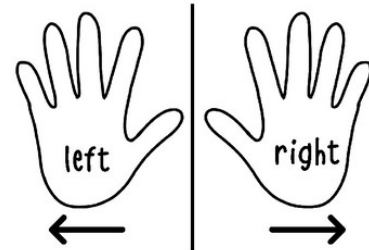# Sociological Theories - Left and Right 'Realism'

## LO1 – Describe Sociological Theories of Criminality

| Assessment Criterion | Content | Amplification |
|---|---|---|
| **AC2.3**<br><br>*You should be able to -*<br><br>Describe Sociological Theories of Criminality | **Sociological Theories**<br>• Social Structure<br>• Interactionism<br>• **Realism** | **You should have knowledge and understanding of:**<br>✓ Marxism<br>✓ Functionalism<br>✓ Labelling<br>✓ **Left and Right Realism** |

### Realism

Realism is really two explanations of criminality, left realism and right realism. These two explanations share some similarities but there are important differences too.



### Right Realism

Right Realism considers crime from the perspective of **political conservatism**, which tends to take a negative view of human nature. Charles Murray (1990) argued some people in society were more predisposed to committing crime because of lower intelligence and inadequate socialisation. Murray talks about the development of an 'underclass' of people who grow up in single parent households, with absent fathers, without adequate role models, and in an intellectual poverty.

### CHARLES MURRAYS AND THE CRIMINAL UNDERCLASS

Murray (1990) suggests there exists a distinct lower-class subculture, below the working class. People belonging to this subculture are likely to be long-term unemployed because they are 'work-shy' - they choose not to work. They prefer to be welfare-dependent, and to live off state benefits and supplement their income by being involved in criminality and the black economy. This subculture is hostile towards the police and authority in general. The subculture is generally lacking in moral values and especially commitment to marriage and family life.

### RIGHT REALIST SOLUTIONS TO CRIME

Right realist believe that human beings are naturally selfish, individualistic and greedy, will generally commit crime if it is in their interests. Rehabilitation of criminals is a 'soft' option - Policies aimed at tackling crime by removing social and economic inequalities associated with poverty and unemployment have failed because they misunderstand the origins of crime.

Right realist thinking in crime is influenced by the broken windows thesis. They tend to approve of, 'zero tolerance' policing, and believe the police should keep clear the streets of deviant elements. They are also strong supporters of control and surveillance measures such as CCTV and ID cards.

Right realists think that the best way to reduce crime is not to change the criminal but to take practical measures to reduce opportunity (to 'build out' crime), and make the situation more difficult for the criminal, i.e. to make sure that the costs of crime clearly outweigh the benefits.

### LEFT REALISM

Left realism analyse crime from a left-wing perspective. They agree with right realists that working class areas are crime hotspots but point out that the main victims of crime are the working class and ethnic minorities themselves. They also suggest that the police take crime in these areas less seriously than in middle or upper class (bourgeoise) areas.

### CRIME, RELATIVE DEPRIVATION & MARGINALISATION

Left realists suggest that in a capitalist society we are surrounded by messages urging us on to acquire more and more stuff (consumerism). Despite society getting wealthier as a whole, working class youth will always have a sense of **relative deprivation.** In ethnic minorities this may be made worse by a belief that prejudice, and discrimination is holding them back.

Left realist argue these groups become **marginalised**. Negative treatment by the police may result in further feelings of hostility and resentment which may spill over into confrontation. Some members of these groups may look to join subcultures to help them cope with the feelings of frustration and may become involved in criminal activities such as drug-pushing and street crimes such as mugging.

### LEFT-REALIST SOLUTIONS TO CRIME

Left realists are positive about human nature and are strong supporters of attempts to rehabilitate offenders. They argue strongly in support alternatives to prison, arguing that prison breaks the link between the offender and community, as such it serves to reinforce offending behaviour.

Left realist believe that the community needs to be involved in tackling crime and are sceptical about 'deterrents' such as the increased use of CCTV and ID Cards. However, they are enthusiastic advocates of initiatives such as community policing and neighbourhood schemes.