

### AC1.3 - THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNDER-REPORTING OF CRIME

There are both **negative** and **positive** effects of the under-reporting of crime, again you need to discuss both to score full marks on this section

#### NEGATIVE EFFECTS

**The Ripple effect:** is sometimes used to describe the secondary effects of crimes. The effects 'ripple' out from the initial crime. For example, domestic abuse may become normalised for the children who have witnessed it and they may become abusers themselves. Similarly, the elderly victim of a street robbery may become too scared to venture out on their own and eventually become house bound.

**Cultural Consequences:** as we note in the previous section (reasons crimes go unreported) the UK is a diverse society and some groups within it may hold different norms and values and may see certain acts as less deviant, even when they are clearly against the law. For example, according to Equality Now a total of 103,000 women and girls aged 15–49 were thought to be living with male genital mutilation (FGM) in England and Wales as of 2011; however, prosecutions for this crime have been very low, only one person as of 2020 has been successfully prosecuted for involvement in FGM (an Ugandan woman whose daughter underwent the procedure), this is in part because in some of the African communities where FGM is practiced there is resistance to police action against this crime.

**Police prioritisation:** If crimes are not reported to the police then the police will form a view that these crimes are not important to the public and they will have lower priority (importance) in police work. This is true of white-collar crime. The public is generally unconcerned about crimes such as Tax Evasion when compared to crimes such as robbery, murder, rape, burglary and so on. These appear to represent a more direct and immediate threat than some white-collar crime and so the public does not lobby (ask) the police to prioritise these crimes

#### POSITIVE EFFECTS

**Decriminalisation and Legal Change:** The longer-term failure to report crime can bring positive change. For example, homosexuality was decriminalised and then legalised over the space of 40 or so years in the UK. Public attitudes became more accepting and there was less reporting of the 'crime' over this period. At the same time the police became less prepared to interfere in people's private lives, the police in the UK are not 'moral' police as in some countries such as Iran or Saudi Arabia. A similar process of attitude change leading to decriminalisation and eventual legal change can be seen at present with the law relating to marijuana consumption.

**Procedural change:** Sometimes procedures change because the reporting of crime is unsatisfactory. For example, the reporting of serious sexual assaults has changed out of all recognition in the past few years. Police forces now have a dedicated rape and sexual assault suite, which is a comfortable room and staffed by specially trained female police officers. In a similar vein, children can now report crimes which are being committed against them to teachers, specially trained officers or helplines such as CHILDLINE. These changes have all been made to make the reporting of under-reported crime easier.

**Cultural change:** not reporting crime can have an effect on the culture of an area. The 'Broken Windows' thesis suggests that when we allow an area to become rundown (broken windows, graffiti and so on), the area itself can act as a magnet for more criminal behaviour. The argument goes that broken windows attract drug users and dealers, pimps and sex workers and eventually robbers, murders and rapists. However, culture change can be positive, by fixing broken windows and cleaning up graffiti an area looks more 'loved'. A study carried out in the city of Philadelphia showed that by fixing-up and repairing vacant buildings and turning waste ground into parks and play areas, crime could be significantly reduced in those areas compared to similar areas where no such efforts were made.