6
Distributive Justice and the Crime Drop

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Introduction

The present chapter seeks to link two of the central facts concerning victimization by crime in the Western world. The first is that the burden of crime is borne very unequally across areas and within areas across households and individuals (Tseloni et al., 2010). The second is that there has been a very substantial cross-national drop in crime as captured by victimization surveys (van Dijk et al., 2007) (Farrell et al., 2010). The present writers seek to establish whether the crime drop has resulted in a more or less *equitable* distribution of crime across households. Inequality of victimization challenges distributive justice. Harms as well as goods should be distributed equitably. Changes in inequality would suggest whether we should regard the crime drop as unequivocally benign (inequality reducing or neutral) or have reservations about its benefits (inequality increasing). The possible outcomes of the analysis have differing implications for criminal justice in general and policing in particular. There is already evidence that policing concentration at least in England and Wales is not proportionate to the presenting crime problem (Ross & Pease, 2008), and reasons have been suggested for this, the writers' favoured account being labelled the "winter in Florida, summer in Alaska" paradox (Townsley & Pease, 2002). This contends that calls for police service are triggered in part by *deviations* from expected levels. People in Florida may experience their winters as cold, and people in Alaska their summers as hot, even though winters in Florida may be warmer than summers in Alaska. Likewise, crime and disorder in generally peaceful communities may trigger calls for service in respect of events that represent nothing more than the hurly burly of everyday life in more crime-challenged areas. A recent systematic review of attempts

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to reduce repeated victimization was encouraging in its conclusions that the prevention of chronic victimization of the same individuals or households is viable and has proven largely successful as an approach to crime reduction (Grove et al., 2012). Thus, were the analyses to show increased inequality in victimization, there would be some consolation insofar as a strategy of concentrating effort on those already victimized would reap dividends. Katherine Thorpe (Thorpe, 2007) was, to our knowledge, the first to identify the crime drop as disproportionately due to reduced repeat victimization (Britton et al., 2012) (Farrell & Pease, 2014). Likewise, Nick Tilley's work addresses issues of distributive justice and the crime drop (Tilley et al., 2011) (Tilley, 2012) though from the perspective of income rather than victimization concentration per se.

A supplementary justification for the present general approach is more speculative, and will not be addressed by analyses reported in this chapter. However, it is potentially important enough to merit mention. Analyses adopting the approach taken here may shed light on the relative merits of the numerous theories for the crime drop. Fifteen theories have been distinguished (Farrell, 2013), which can be roughly placed into one or more of three categories corresponding to the three necessary elements for crime based on Routine Activities Theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979) change in the supply of motivated offenders (waning crack markets, immigration, declining lead levels in the blood), change in capable guardianship of an official kind (better policing strategies, more imprisonment), and reductions in the supply of victims (increased security of goods and services, migration to online leisure activities). It is contended that the first two putative causes of the crime drop would yield reduced inequality of victimization across the board, given what is known about offender concentration and travel to crime distances (Wiles & Costello, 2000). The third may not. To reiterate, it should be stressed that this chapter suggests a way of approaching the issue of how changes in the presenting profile of crime victimization may inform the reasons for the crime drop, rather than exploring the data in the detail that would be sufficient to clarify crime drop origins. The more detailed work is in hand. The criminological tradition within which the work is located is that pioneered by Marcus Felson and his colleagues. The writers are grateful for the opportunity to offer the work in this volume celebrating Marcus' work.

The data analysed here comes from all 20 sweeps of the British Crime Survey, recently rebadged as the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). Data for the present study are thus drawn from close to 600,000 CSEW respondents over 30 years. Many key variables have been coded

consistently over the period, or can be reconciled across sweeps. Three linked features of CSEW convention are controversial and must be discussed.

1. CSEW defines repeat victimization as multiple victimizations *of the same type*. Thus, a heavily victimized household may not appear as such if it has suffered, say, one instance of vandalism, one of burglary, and one of assault on a household member. This convention is rejected for the purposes of the analyses reported here. The heterogeneity of criminal careers has long been recognized, though still underestimated by police officers (Roach & Pease, 2014). The heterogeneity of *victim* careers has received less research attention.

2. Statistics of victimization experience may be drawn from either the CSEW screener questions in the main questionnaire (completed by all respondents) or the forms completed by those identified as victims in the screener questionnaire. The justification for choosing the latter option is that some respondents report events falling outside the designated recall period and some events which turn out not to be crimes after closer questioning. Against that, the screener questions do provide an account of victimization experiences unconstrained by the artificial limits described immediately below.

3. A limit is imposed upon the number of victimization forms which a respondent may complete and upon the number of events which can be reported as a series (that is, events of the same type under the same circumstances and probably by the same offender). These constraints have been identified and criticized in respect of both CSEW and its US equivalent survey (Farrell & Pease, 2007; Planty & Strom, 2007). A limited remedy to the problem of undercounting the victimizations against chronic victims has been proposed in for the US survey (Lauritsen et al., 2012) but not for CSEW.

The *initial* analyses reported here are, in the light of the above, based on responses to *screener* questions. Victimizations were aggregated across categories so that the unit of count was total household victimizations reported by a respondent. All the analyses were repeated using the victim forms and are reported.

Walby and Allen (Walby & Allen, 2004) capped series incidents at 51 and used a value of 60 incidents where there were too many for a respondent to recall, a practice adopted by Farrell and Pease (2007). In this chapter, an empirically refined approach was applied. A cap of 49

was applied for each crime type. The decision was made by examining frequencies of each crime type for each year showing that a miniscule proportion of less than a tenth of a percentage was affected by exclusions of respondents reporting 50 or more events. This is not to question the veracity of those reporting more offences, which requires a change of CSEW methodology to clarify.

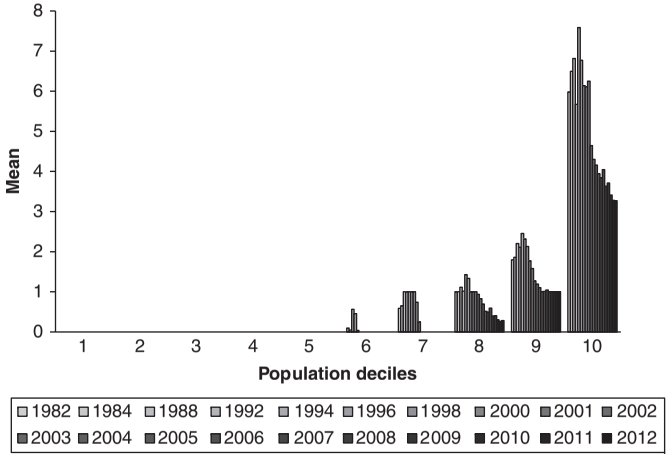
Various measures of inequality were considered, and the simplest chosen. This involved ranking households by number of victimizations suffered, dividing the ranked households into deciles, and calculating mean number of victimizations per household per year and the proportion of each year's total victimizations suffered by households in each decile. The approach has similarities with previous single-year analyses (Trickett et al., 1992; Tseloni & Pease, 2005).

Results

Figure 6.1 depicts the crime drop by victimization decile. It will be seen that no crime was captured by the survey in the first five deciles. Interestingly, the sixth and seventh deciles have non-zero values *exclusively in the early sweeps*. In recent sweeps, these deciles were also crime free (insofar as that was revealed by CSEW samples). Clearly, a population survey would reveal some crime in those deciles. Eighth, ninth, and tenth deciles show a massive reduction in mean crimes per household over time. In terms of number of crimes suffered per household, even the most victimized households seem to have benefited in the crime drop, from suffering six crimes per household in 1981 down to fewer than four in recent sweeps. In fact, in absolute terms, the most victimized have benefited most from the crime drop.

While the absolute victimization of the most victimized decile has declined quite dramatically, the *proportion* of total victimization suffered by the most victimized decile has increased. After an initial decline in the 1990s, that proportion increased to just over 70 per cent of total victimizations. It is probably coincidental that the initial decline coincided with the time when the prevention of repeat victimization was a tactic in vogue and supported by central government (Pease, 1998).

Parallel analyses based on victim forms are presented as Figures 6.3 and 6.4. Figure 6.3 shows a similar picture to Figure 6.1, with the most victimized decile showing the greatest absolute decline in mean victimizations. Figure 4 shows a similar picture to Figure 6.2, that is, an increasing *proportion* of crime being suffered by the most victimized decile.



Year	1982	1984	1988	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2001	2002
Total sample	10,905	11,030	11,741	11,713	16,550	16,348	14,947	19,411	89,85	32,824
Victimized sample	3,960	4,029	4,810	4,740	7,554	7,282	6,035	7,258	2,913	9,637
Total crimes	10,216	11,043	13,186	11,530	21,574	19,421	15,398	18,674	77,78	22,485
Year	**2003**	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
Total sample	36,479	37,931	45,120	47,796	47,203	46,286	46,983	44,638	46,754	46,031
Victimized sample	10,329	10,226	11,350	11,924	12,249	11,103	11,283	10,269	10,585	10,515
Total crimes	23,070	22,595	24,645	25,561	26,813	23,274	24,003	21,023	21,232	20,956

Figure 6.1 Mean victimizations per household by decile, CSEW Sweeps, 1982–2012

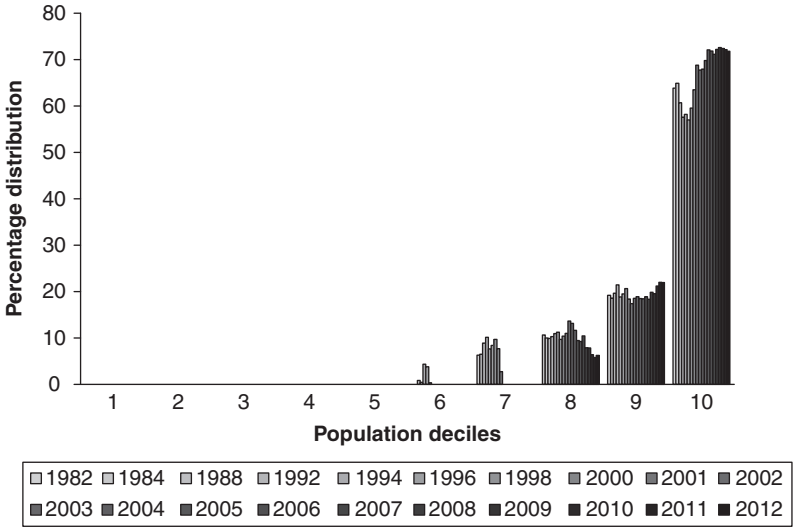


Figure 6.2 Proportion of total victimizations by decile, CSEW Sweeps, 1982–2012

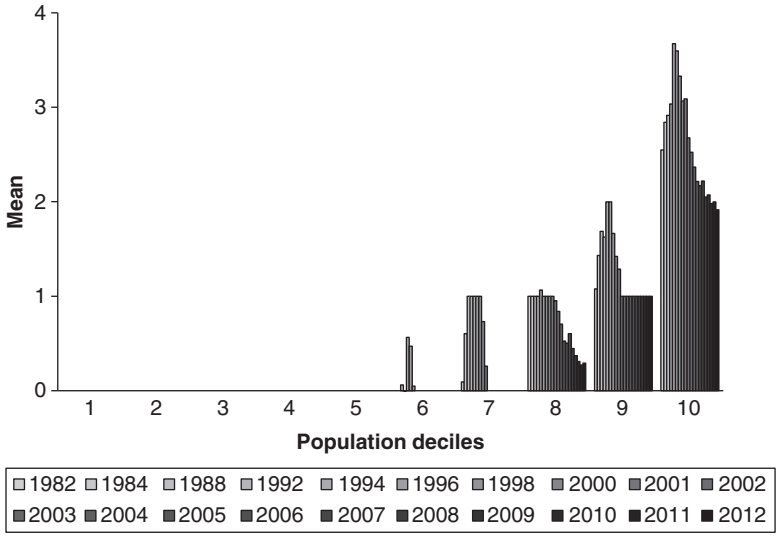


Figure 6.3 Mean victimizations per household by decile using Victim Forms, CSEW Sweeps, 1982–2012

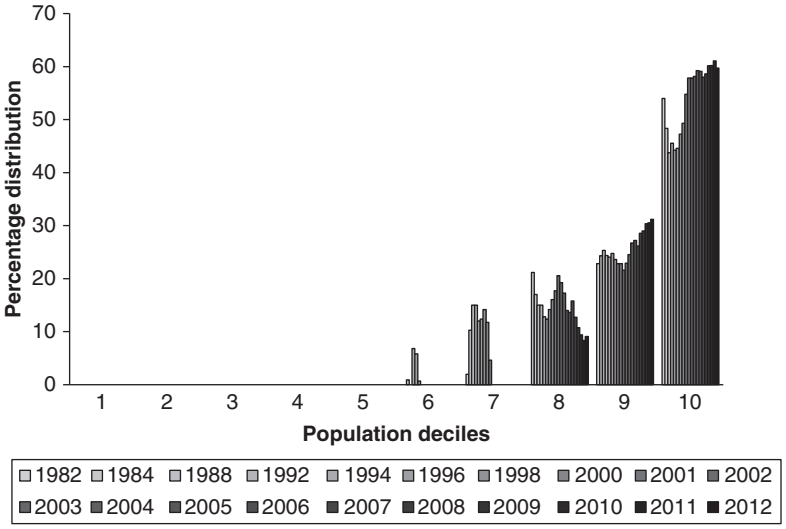


Figure 6.4 Proportion of total victimizations by decile using Victim Forms, CSEW Sweeps, 1982–2012

The next step in the present chapter addresses the question of whether the attributes of heavily victimized households remain similar across time. There is already a substantial literature on attributes associated with crime victimization (Osborn & Tseloni, 1998; Tseloni, 2006), but these tend to be analyses at single points in time.

So, the question is whether the same variables which distinguish the most victimized 10 per cent of the households from the rest in 1982 are the same as those which distinguish the most victimized in the top crime decile from the rest in 2012. The anticipation is that by and large they will be, and the conclusion to be reached is that the risk factors of 2012 are similar to the risk factors of 1982, that is, the same kinds of households are the most victimized across time and across deciles over the same year. This would validate attention to households with the relevant attributes (Tseloni & Pease, 2014). Bear in mind that the present analysis says nothing about area effects, which will also inform prioritization of crime prevention effort (Osborn & Tseloni, 1998; Kershaw & Tseloni, 2005; Tseloni, 2006).

Table 6.1 summarizes the analyses. Contingency table analysis was used for categorical variables and the Mann-Whitney U Test for ordinal variables. For every variable, the direction of the difference is the same

Table 6.1 Variables associated with year and decile differences in victimization

Variable	Top crime decile vs remainder 1982	Top crime decile vs remainder 2012
Age of HRP (younger)	<0.001	<0.001
Gender (male vs female)	ns	ns
Marital status (married vs non-married)	<0.01	<0.001
Race (white vs non-white)	ns	ns
Number of adults in household (fewer)	ns	<0.005
Number of children in household (fewer)	<0.001	<0.001
Employment (full time vs other)	<0.001	<0.005
Employment type (self-employed vs employed)	ns	ns
Number of cars (fewer)	<0.005	<0.001
Number of bikes (fewer)	<0.001	<0.001
Accommodation (owner occupied vs rental)	<0.001	<0.001
Accommodation type (detached + semi-detached vs other)	<0.001	<0.001
Living in the area (more than 1 year vs less than 1 year)	<0.001	<0.001
Living in the address (more than 1 year vs less than 1 year)	<0.001	<0.001
Seen crime in last year (yes vs no)	<0.001	<0.001
Feels safe in dark (safe vs unsafe)	<0.05	<0.001
Worried about crime (non-worried vs worried)	<0.001	<0.001

Note: Categorical variable statistics are chi-square with one degree of freedom. The ordinal variable statistic is *z*. Values without statistical significance are noted as *ns*.

in the years compared. The word or phrase in the left column that is the latter option in brackets of Table 6.1 is the over-represented alternative. For example, in terms of employment (full time vs other), those with other types of employment were more victimized than full time employees. Cell entries are probabilities of the relationship.

With huge sample sizes, the significance matters little. The important point is the consistent direction of difference, as the characteristics associated with highly victimized household are consistent across survey sweeps.

Discussion

The conclusions reached here apply to just one national victimization survey and total crime and should be regarded as an initial foray into the question of how the crime drop meshes with notions of distributive justice. The broad-brush analyses reported above tend on balance to suggest that the crime drop was benign in that crimes against the most victimized households fell to the greatest extent in *absolute* terms. Yet, the *proportion* of total crime suffered by the most victimized 10 per cent of households *increased*. The conclusion to be tentatively reached is that attention to households already victimized is now no less important than before in reducing total crime. One way of expressing this is to point out that some 30 per cent of all crime captured by the 2012 survey was experienced by households that had already suffered at least one previous crime in the recall period. Bear in mind that the effective recall period for a first victimization is a year, for a second only the period between the first victimization and year end, and for the third victimization the period between the second victimization and year end. This diminishing time window means that crimes suffered by those previously victimized is massively higher than captured by the survey and the scope for crime reduction by the prevention of repeats is correspondingly higher. The decline in total crime makes the strategy of crime reduction via the prevention of repeat victimization more viable, though compromised by reductions in police resources. Focused patrol targeting areas with high likelihood of crime seems increasingly important (Buerger et al., 1995; Koper, 1995) as do focused proactive arrests (Sherman & Eck, 2002) As police resourcing declines and an understanding of the concentration of crime on the same households increases, such tactics should arguably take centre stage in policing.

As noted earlier, the work presented here is intended primarily to flag an approach to data (already available and archived), which seems to hold much promise. The writers have in hand the following studies:

1. Analysis of CSEW trends by offence type to clarify which exhibit least precipitous decline and greatest remaining concentration in the highest decile
2. Equivalent analyses of other national and cross-national victimization surveys to see whether the "signature" of the crime drop is common across countries
3. Exploration of the drop–concentration nexus by looking at variables which may clarify what is happening, such as changes in the

proportion of offenders seen and previously known, single versus group offending, and weapon use

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