

ETHNIC MINORITIES AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Several years ago, Dave Drew of Sheffield City Polytechnic and his former colleague Tony Bendell, came to discuss with me what information was available regarding the black population in the Criminal Justice System. As a subscriber to *Radical Statistics Newsletter* I had expressed an interest in criminal statistics. The Guardian had recently revealed that the London police race-coded people arrested and their victims, where possible, but little hard data was available. Since then some statistics have been published which show, among other things, that in London black people are over-represented among those arrested and convicted compared with the general population. This is not surprising as black people tend to come from the socially disadvantaged and younger groups from which white offenders also tend to be drawn. Readers of *Radical Statistics Newsletter* will be familiar with the ensuing debate (see Drew 1984).

My interest in this topic resulted in my obtaining from the home Office tapes giving the outcome of prosecution for all those dealt with in the London courts in 1983, at which time race was still coded. I have now analyzed the data for two age-groups of males, juvenile aged 14-16 and men aged 17-25, distinguishing Afro-Caribbeans (here called black), Asians (from the Indian sub-continent) and whites. Two important conclusions have emerged. First, black people tend to be acquitted more often than white people and Asians; secondly black people are more likely to get a custodial sentence than white people and Asians. However, these two results are due to proportionately more black people being tried and sentenced in the Crown Court, where acquittal rates are higher than in the magistrates courts and custodial sentences are more likely. Within each type of court there was very little difference in the sentences. As previous convictions were not available no conclusions could be drawn regarding the fairness of sentencing. The reason more black people go to the Crown Court is a topic that needs investigation. A third conclusion was that for those aged 17-25 remands in custody rather than on bail were more likely for black people than white people and Asians. In the main the differences were fairly small, but statistically significant..

Another spin-off from my initial contact with Dave Drew has been the award of a grant from the ESRC to investigate 'race and crime' in a provincial city.

This research has consisted to comparing arrest rates in small areas and following through the outcome of arrest for the three ethnic groups, and also carrying out a survey to investigate the experience of and attitude to the police of the three groups. This research is currently being analyzed and is expected to result in some interesting conclusions.

In 1985 the London police ceased coding race. In view of the fact that the prisons already record race and this is being introduced into the probation service, it is unfortunate that the Home Office have not requested race to be coded on the forms returned to them (from all police forces) which give the outcome of court proceedings. It is important for ethnic monitoring to be carried out for as long as there is thought to be discrimination within the Criminal Justice System.

References

- Drew, D (1984) "Race and crime statistics" Radical Statistic Newsletter 30
- Walker, MA (1987) "Interpreting race and crime statistics" Journal of the Royal Statistical Society 150
- ibid (1988a) "The outcome of prosecutions of young males, by race, in London 1983" British Journal of Criminology 28
- ibid (1988b) *Court Proceedings and remands of Whites, Afro-Caribbeans and Asian men: London 1983* (unpublished)

See also:

Drew, D, Carr-Hill, R (1988) "Black, police and crime" in Ashok Bhat et. al (eds) *Britain's Black Population* (London. Gower/Radical Statistics Race Group)

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