

Do the 'poor' experience more crime and greater fear of crime than the 'rich'?¹

Christina Pantazis and David Gordon

1. Introduction

Crime and fear of crime have emerged as major public and political issues in recent decades. This may, in part, be attributed to the enormous growth in recorded crime since the 1970's, where the average annual increase has been about 5%. In 1992, crime recorded by the police peaked to 5.4 million. However, the 'true' level of crime is three times as high according to British Crime Survey estimates (Mayhew, Maung, and Mirrlees-Black, 1993). This period has also seen increases in levels of fear of crime. Surveys repeatedly show that crime has surpassed unemployment and health as issues of major public concern (Jacobs and Worcester, 1991). Many criminologists conclude that that fear of crime poses almost as large a threat to society as crime itself (Clemente and Kleinman, 1977).

Both official statistics and research show that there is an uneven distribution in criminal victimisation and in fear of crime (Barclay, 1993; Mayhew, Maung and Mirrlees-Black, 1993). Some individuals and some geographical areas are more vulnerable to crime than others and certain groups fear crime more. A consensus appears to exist between various government departments and some criminologists, that there is a positive relationship between poverty indicators and victimisation. In short, there is a strong belief that the 'poor' experience more crime than the 'rich'.

Home Office research has demonstrated high risks of crime in 'poor' areas, particularly in areas with large council estates (Ramsay, 1983; Hope, 1986; Hope and Shaw, 1988). Evidence of high levels of crime on poor council estates led to the Department on Environment sponsoring the Priority Estates Project in 1979, which involved attempts to reduce crime on poor and disadvantaged council estates through improved management (Foster and Hope, 1993). Within the discipline of criminology, 'left realism' is the main supporter for the idea that the 'poor' experience more crime (Lea and Young, 1984). One criminologist has even likened crime to a regressive tax that falls disproportionately on poor people (Downes, 1983).

This paper explores the controversial relationship between poverty and crime, and between poverty and fear of crime. It is based on secondary analysis of the 1992 British Crime Survey (BCS) and 1990 Breadline Britain Survey (BBS). So far there have been six sweeps of the BCS in England and Wales. In the 1992 sweep, a representative sample of 10,059 people aged 16 and over were questioned about the crimes committed against them in the previous year. In the 1990 BBS, a representative sample of 1,831 households were interviewed about

¹ This paper was presented at the 22nd conference of the European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control, Komotini, Greece, August 25-26 1994.

their standard of living. It estimated that in 1990 20% of British households (approximately 11 million people) were living in poverty (Gordon, and Pantazis, 1995). In addition to measuring the extent and nature of poverty, the BBS also examined some of the problems supposedly experienced disproportionately by poor households, such as crime and fear of crime.

2. The measurement and definition of crime

The measurement of crime presents a major problem for criminologists. Many crimes are neither reported nor recorded, resulting in the police crime statistics underestimating the 'real' level of crime. Victimisation studies, or crime surveys, provide more reliable results. They provide a more accurate picture by assessing the crime that police statistics fail to include. The 1992 BCS found that only 43% of crimes were reported to the police and that only 30% of crimes were recorded by the police. However, crime surveys do not uncover all crimes. Crimes are underestimated when people conceal crimes committed against them, (for example, as in some rape cases where the offender is a friend or family member). Crime surveys will also have problems concerning response rates. For instance, although the BCS achieves a good response rate (77% in 1992), non-respondents may include a disproportionately high number of victims.

Most victimisation surveys count only certain types crimes of crimes. For instance, the BCS acknowledges that it excludes crimes against organisations, such as fraud, shoplifting, fare evasion, commercial burglary and robbery, and "victimless" crimes, such as drug and alcohol misuse, consensual sexual offences, or crimes where people may not be aware of having been victimised - as in fraud. Crime surveys also rely on a narrow conception of crime. Critical criminologists have shown how crime is a social construction (Chambliss and Seidman, 1971; Sumner, 1976; Box, 1983). It is argued that both legal and common-sense definitions of crime, encompass the activities of poor people, but exclude the activities of the rich and powerful (Box, 1983, 1987).

3. The definition of poverty

The definition and measurement of poverty is subject to much debate. The pioneering work of Townsend showed that poverty was best understood in terms of relative deprivation using a measure of standard of living (Townsend, 1979, 1986, 1993). However, others have argued for the use of both income and deprivation criteria in identifying poverty (Ringen, 1987; 1988). Unfortunately, the BCS does not collect the detailed information on people's living standards which is needed to measure of poverty directly. However, the BCS does contain detail on income and other indicators of poverty such as, tenure, car ownership, economic activity and social class. These indicators, when combined to form a deprivation index, can provide a useful alternative in situations where information on standard of living is lacking (Townsend, Phillimore and Beattie, 1986; Goldblatt, 1990; Phillimore, Beattie and Townsend, 1994). This paper therefore uses both income and combinations of indicators to measure poverty.

4. Poor areas and crime

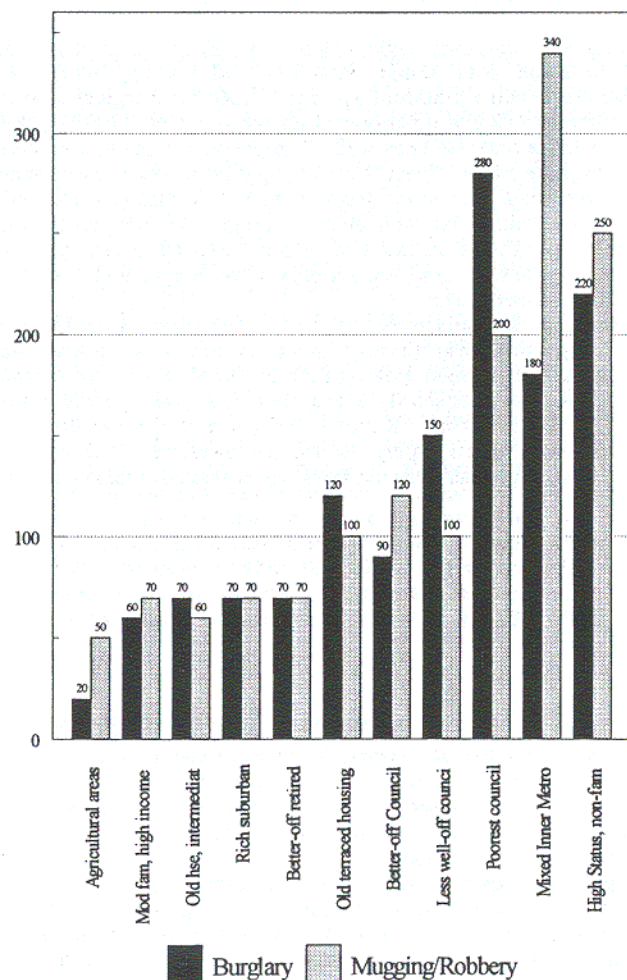
A number of studies have established that 'poor' areas suffer from higher crime rates than 'better off' areas (Morris 1957, Ramsay 1983, Hope 1986). The 1990 criminal statistics² recorded a crime rate of 12.8% in the Urban Programme district authorities compared with only 9.6% for the remaining English and Welsh district authorities. There was, however, wide variation within the 57 urban areas. The crime rate ranged from 5.8% in Rotherham to 21.7% in Kensington and Chelsea.

Findings from the combined 1982, 1988 and 1992 BCS reinforces the link between crime and some 'poor' areas (Mayhew and Maung 1992). Figure 1 shows the relative crime rates (national average = 100) for burglary and robbery, for residents of different ACORN neighbourhood groups (CACI 1992). The Mixed Inner Metropolitan Areas and the Less well off and Poorest council estates suffer from relatively high crime rates. These ACORN neighbourhoods are characterised by low income households. However, High Status, Non-family areas which are characterised by households with well above average incomes, also suffer from high crime rates. Agricultural Areas and Older Terraced Housing which also typically contain many low income households have respectively very low and average burglary and robbery rates.

The BCS research demonstrates that not all 'poor' areas suffer from high levels of crime, suggesting that poverty alone is not a sufficient factor for experiencing victimisation. Despite linking high levels of crime with certain types of 'poor' areas, it does not necessarily follow that it is 'poor' people/households who suffer from high rates of crime. It may be that it is the 'better off' who live in 'poor' areas who are disproportionately the victims of crime. If this is the case, then this and other research has suffered from the so-called 'ecological fallacy'.

²The criminal statistics broken down by Urban Programme authorities were provided by the Home Office as part of the Socio-demographic Change in the Inner Cities Project (Department of the Environment).

**Figure 1 Indexed Rate of Crime for Combined 1984, 1988 and 1992
British Crime Surveys by ACORN Neighbourhoods**

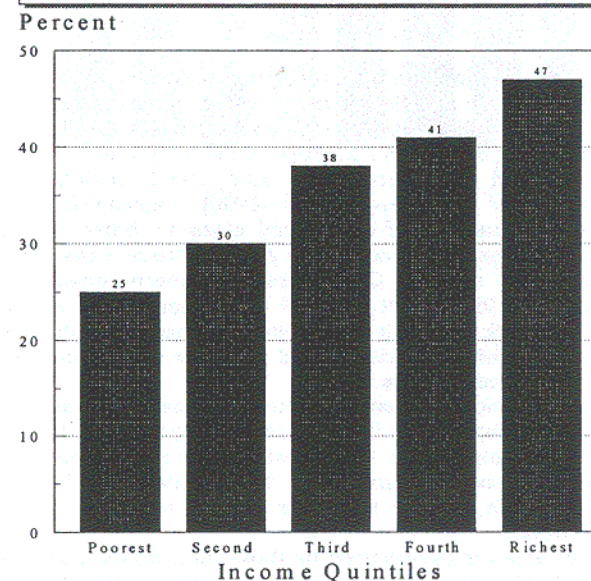


5. Results from the 1992 British Crime Survey

The BCS is now accepted to be most accurate guide to measuring conventional crimes. The survey asks respondents about their own experience and that of others in the household for household crimes: burglary, thefts of and from vehicles, vandalism and theft from the home. They are asked only about their own experiences with respect to personal crimes: assaults, robberies, thefts from the person, and other personal thefts. In 1992 34% percent of respondents experienced any one of these household crimes, whilst 12% experienced any one of these personal crimes.

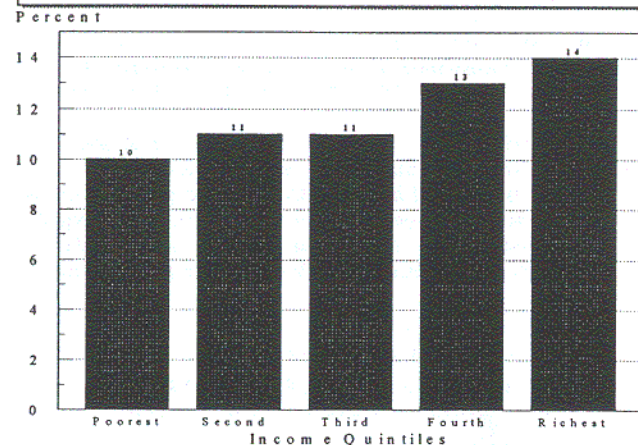
Figure 2 shows the relationship between the experience of household crime and gross household income quintiles. There is a clear linear relationship between victimisation and household income. Contrary to popular and academic opinion, the 'rich' experience the most crime whereas the 'poor' experience the least. One in two respondents in the richest 20% of households experience crime, compared with only one in four respondents in the poorest quintile.

**Figure 2 Victim of Household Crime
by Household Income Groups (BCS 1992)**



A similar relationship between personal crime and income can be observed in Figure 3. The 'rich' experience marginally more personal crime than the 'poor'. Fourteen percent of individuals in the richest 20% of households experience crime, compared with only 10% in the poorest quintile.

Figure 3 Victim of Personal Crime by Gross Household Income Groups (BCS 1992)



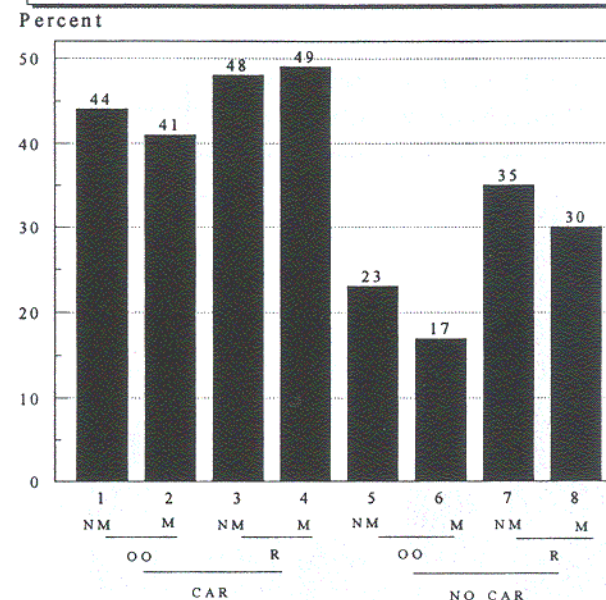
In addition to income, victimisation can be investigated according to three other indicators of poverty; lack of vehicle access, rented tenure and manual employment. Many health studies interested in explaining health differences between social groups formed deprivation indexes using combinations of socio-economic variables (Townsend, Phillimore and Beattie, 1986; Goldblatt, 1990; Phillimore, Beattie, 1994). For instance, Goldblatt (1990) constructed an index combining car access, housing tenure and social class in order to explain differences in mortality between socio-economic groups. These variables were chosen for specific theoretical reasons. Car access was chosen because it was considered the best surrogate for current income,³ whilst non-owner occupation was thought to reflect both lack of wealth and income (Townsend, Phillimore and Beattie, 1986). The inclusion of social class (used in terms of manual Vs non-manual) had to do with historical reasons.⁴

Figure 4 demonstrates victimisation risks for individuals according to the index used by Goldblatt, although it has been adapted to represent a deprivation scale. The deprivation scale ranges from 1 to 8, with those individuals with the lowest level of deprivation scoring 1 and those individuals with the highest scoring 8. In contrast to health, there is no simple positive relationship between deprivation and victimisation.

The highest crime rates are experienced by those individuals with a better standard of living (1 to 4). Their crime rate ranges from 36% to 47%. Those with a car, who live in rented accommodation and who have a non-manual occupation experience the highest levels of victimisation (47%). The lowest crime rates are

experienced by those individuals with the worst standard of living (5 to 8). Their crime rate ranges from 9% to 26%.

Figure 4 Victim of Household Crime by Standard of Living (1992 BCS)

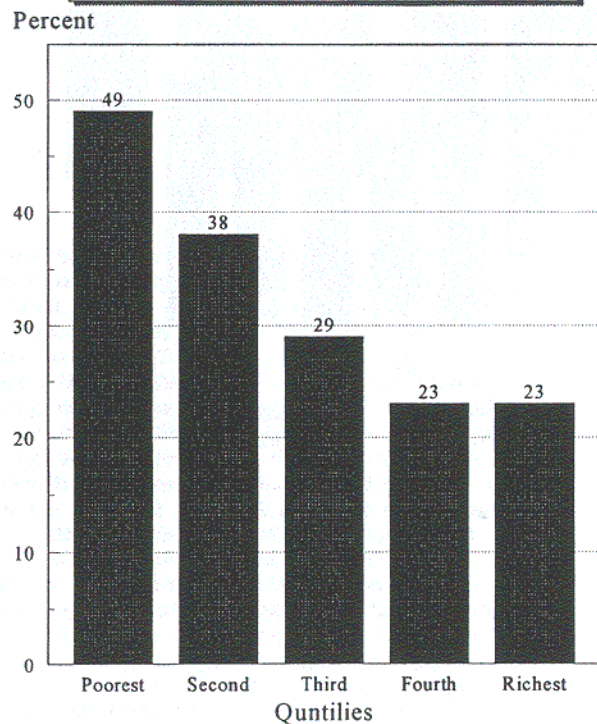


³ This is supported by the fact that in the 1992 BCS, the average household income of individuals with vehicle access is 20,832, three times the household income level of those individuals without vehicle access.

⁴ The Registrar General's Social Class Classification was developed specifically in order to measure the health differentials between different social groups.

The relationship between household income and fear of crime is shown in Figure 5. Respondents were asked how safe they felt walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark. Respondents in the poorest household income quintile have the highest rates of fear (49%), whilst respondents in the richest two income quintiles have a fear of crime of only 23%.

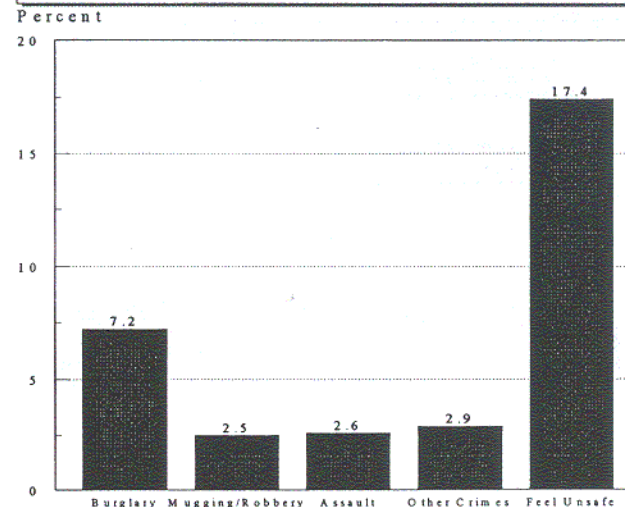
Figure 5 Fear of Crime by Gross Household Income Groups



6. Results from the 1990 Breadline Britain survey

In order to clarify the complex relationship between poverty and crime, the Breadline Britain survey asked respondents whether they or members of their household experienced burglary, assault, mugging or robbery, or any other crime in the last year. Fourteen per cent said that they or members of their household had experienced crime. Figure 6 shows the distribution of crimes experienced in the last year, 7.2% of households had been burgled, 2.5% mugged, 2.6% had been assaulted and 2.9% had been victims of other crimes.

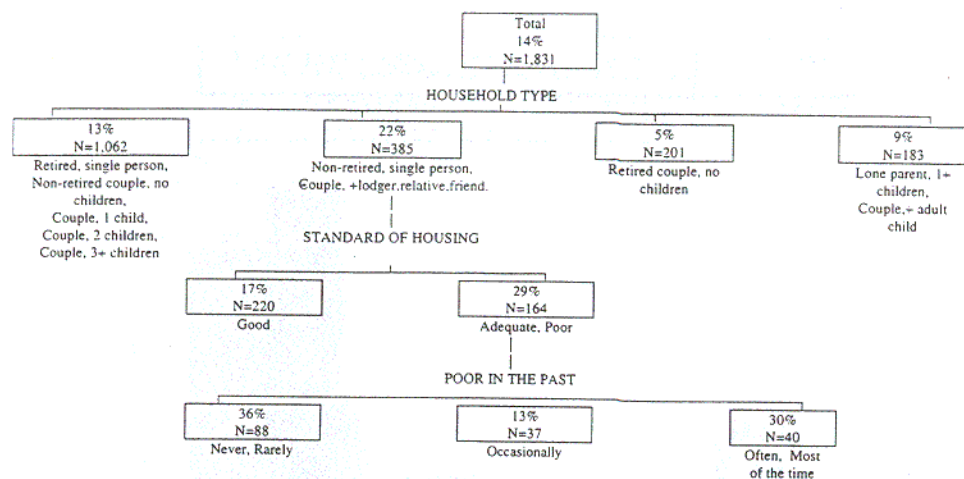
Figure 6 BBS 1990 Distribution of Crime Experienced in the Past Year and Fear of Crime



Fear of crime was assessed by asking respondents whether they or members of their household felt unsafe in their local neighbourhood. Seventeen per cent said they feared crime. This is much lower than the 1992 BCS figure of 32%. The BCS question asked respondents about feeling unsafe when walking alone at night, a question that would predictably give a much higher result.

In order to assess which individuals were most likely to experience crime and fear crime, the Chi-Squared Automatic Interaction Detector method (CHAID) was used to explore the most significant variables affecting victimisation rates and fear of crime. CHAID analysis allows both the combination of categories within variables and the sorting of variables to produce the most statistically significant results. CHAID also allows the identification of sub-groups with particularly high and low victimisation and fear of crime rates.

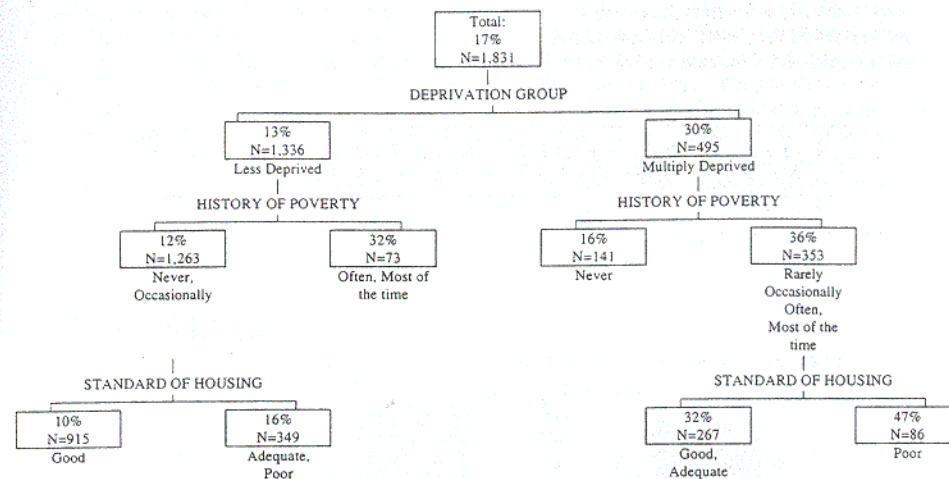
CHAID 1 Victim of Crime



CHAID 1 shows the most significant factors "explaining" victimisation levels in the Breadline Britain survey. The boxes show the sample size of the sub-group and the percent of the sample of households with victims of crime. The stems of the CHAID diagram indicate which are the most significant variables with those of greater significance nearer the top.

Household Type is the most significant factor affecting the likelihood of victimisation. The type that is most victimised is the single non-retired and large, adult only households. In this sub-group of 385 households, 85 households have been victims of crime (22%). This group can be further sub-divided into those who are in 'good' accommodation and those who are in 'poor' or 'adequate' accommodation. Twenty-nine per cent of the 164 households in this latter group have been victims. This sub-group can again be sub-divided by their history of poverty. The likelihood of being a victim of crime is greatest (36%) for the sub-group who have 'never' or 'rarely' been poor in the past. Student and ex-student households might fit this description (see *The Guardian* 21/9/1993).

CHAID 2 Fear of Crime



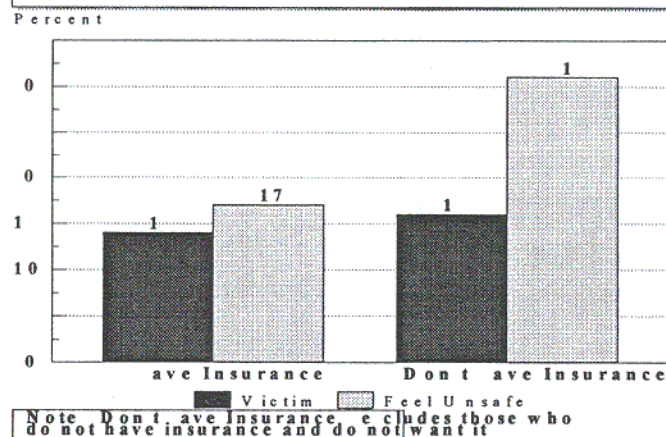
The CHAID analysis illustrates that poverty is not the significant factor explaining victimisation. Type of household, followed by standard of housing and a history of poverty were more significant than deprivation level, social class, household income, sex and age of the respondent in explaining experience of crime.

CHAID 2 shows the most significant factors relating to fear of crime. In this case, deprivation is the most important factor for people fearing crime, affecting 30% of the multiply deprived. Furthermore, fear of crime increases when deprivation is compounded with a long history of poverty and a poor standard of housing. Of the multiply deprived, 36% who have experienced poverty in the past felt unsafe in their local neighbourhood and, of this group, 47% of those in poor housing, fear crime. Age and sex were not as significant in explaining fear of crime.

7. Fear of Crime and Lack of Insurance

Although fear of crime is often seen as irrational by many criminologists, the effects of crime, particularly property crime, will be greatest on low income households which cannot afford to replace lost possessions. In these circumstances, fear of crime cannot be considered to be irrational. Respondents in the Breadline Britain survey were asked if they had contents insurance and, if they did not, whether this was because they could not afford it. Figure 7 shows that households with no insurance⁵ suffer almost twice as much fear of crime as household with insurance, despite having only a 2% higher crime rate.

Figure 7 Victim of Crime, Fear of Crime by Possession of Insurance (BBS 1990)



Eighty-five per cent of the group with no insurance suffered from multiple deprivation (i.e. lacked three or more necessities). As Paula, who also appeared in the television series for Breadline Britain made clear:

"We haven't got insurance simply for the fact that we can't afford it.... It's mainly for your personal possessions, if they break in, that's just gone... It's really pot luck, take your chance. You go out and you lock the doors, if they're broken when you come back there's nothing you can do about it." (Paula 2)

⁵Those households without insurance because they do not want it have been excluded to prevent distortion in the analysis. This group's fear of crime is similar to that of the group that possesses insurance rather than the group that cannot afford insurance.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

From this preliminary survey evidence, it appears that poverty has an important impact on fear of crime but not victimisation. The evidence from the 1992 BCS, shows the respondents in the richest households as being twice as likely to experience household crime compared with the poorest. Car ownership is an important aspect of this, since a large proportion of crime is vehicle related. However, the rich were also marginally more likely to experience personal crime. Some criminologists have argued that the respondents level of education may explain differential rates of violent crime. That is to say, respondents with a higher level of education may have a lower threshold for violence, and are therefore more likely to report an incident as a crime. This in an area which clearly requires further investigation. On the other hand, the analysis showed a definite link between poverty and fear of crime. Poor people suffer from a disproportionately high level of fear of crime regardless of whether or not they have been victimised. This fear is not irrational but results from the greater impact that crime has on poor people.

REFERENCES

- Barclay G. C., Drew, C., Hatton., R. and Abbot, C. (1993) Digest 2 Information on the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales. Home Office Research and Statistics Department, HMSO: London.
- Box S. (1983) *Power, Crime and Mystification*. Routledge, London
- Box S. (1987) *Recession, Crime and Punishment*. MacMillan Education LTD, London
- Box S., Hale C. and Andrews, G. (1988) Explaining the Fear of Crime. *British Journal Of Criminology* 28(3): 240-357
- Bridgwood A., Savage D. (ed by Goddard E.) (1991) *General Household Survey*. OPCS, HMSO: London
- Brieman L, Friedman, J.H, Olshen, R.A and Stone, C. J (1984). *Classification and Regression Trees*. Wadsworth, Belmont, CA.
- CACI (1992) *The ACORN User Guide*. CACI Limited: London.
- Chambliss W. J., and Seidman R. B. (1971) *Law, Order and Power*. Addison-Wesley: Reading
- Clement F, and Kleiman, M. B (1977). Fear of crime in the United States. *Social Forces* 56:519-531
- Frayman H., Mack J., Lansley S., Gordon D. and Hills H. (1991) *Breadline Britain 1990's - the Findings of the Television Series*. Domino Films and London Weekend Television: London
- Garofalo J (1981) The fear of crime and its consequences. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 72:839-857
- Gordon D., Townsend P., Bramley G., Bradshaw J. and Pantazis C (1994) *Breadline Britain in the 1990s - A draft Report to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation* (unpublished)
- Gosschalk B., and Frayman H., (1991) The Changing Nature of Deprivation in Britain - An Inner Cities Perspective. *Political and Social Issues in Urban Industrial Societies - Joint session with WAPOR*
- Hope T (1986). Council Tenants and Crime. *Home Office Research Bulletin*, 21, 46-51.

- Home Office Standing Conference on Crime Prevention (December 1988), *Report of the Working Group on the Costs of Crime*, Home Office
- Hough M. and Mayhew P. (1983), *The British Crime Survey*, a HORPU Report, London: HMSO
- Hough M. and Mayhew P. (1985), *Taking Account of Crime: Key Findings from the 1984 British Crime Survey*, a HORPU Report, London: HMSO
- Jacobs E. and Worcester R. (1991), *Typically British? The Prudential MORI Guide*, Bloomsbury Publishing Limited, London.
- Kass G (1980). An Exploratory Technique for Investigating Large Quantities of Categorical Data. *Applied Statistics*, 29, 119-127.
- Lea J. and Young J. (1993 edition), *What is to be Done About Law and Order ?*, Pluto Press, London
- Mack J. and Lansley S. (1985) *Poor Britain*, Allen and Unwin: London
- Mayhew P., Elliot D., and Dowds D. (1989), *The 1988 British Crime Survey*, a HORPU Report, London: HMSO
- Mayhew P. and Maung N. A. (1992). Surveying Crime: Findings from the 1992 British Crime Survey. *Home Office Research and Statistics Department Research Findings No 2*, 5pp
- Mayhew P., Maung N. A., and Mirrless-Black.,C. (1993) *The 1992 British Crime Survey*, a HORPU Report, London: HMSO
- Maxfield M. (1987) Explaining fear of crime: evidence from the 1984 British Crime Survey, *Research and Planning Unit Paper 43*, London: HMSO
- James Meikle (21/9/1993) Rise in student victims of crime blamed on poor accommodation, *The Guardian*
- Mirrless-Black C., and Maung N. A (1994) Fear of Crime: Findings from the 1992 British Crime Survey. *Home Office Research and Statistics Department. Research Findings No 9* pg.-6
- Morris T (1957). *The Criminal Area*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Ramsay M (1983). City-Centre Crime. *Home Office Research Bulletin*, 16, 5-8.
- Smith S. J. (1983) Public Policy and the Effects of Crime in the Inner City: A British Example, *Urban Studies*, 20, 229-239
- Sumner C (1976). Marxism and deviance theory. In P. Wiles, (ed) *Crime and Delinquency in Britain*, Vol. 2. Martin Robertson: London
- Travis A., (20/4/1994) Theft and rape cases mars reported crime fall, *The Guardian*
- Trickett A., Osborn D.R., Seymour J., and Pease K. (1992) What is Different about High Crime Areas?. *British Journal of Criminology*. 32, 1; 81-89
- Veit-Wilson J.H (1989) Consensual Approaches to Poverty Lines and Social Security. *Journal of Social Policy*, 16 (2):183-211
- Walker R.(1987) Consensual Approaches to the Definition of Poverty: Towards an Alternative Methodology. *Journal of Social Policy*, 16 (2): 213-226
- Young J. (1994) Incessant Chatter: Recent Paradigms in Criminology. In Maguire M., Morgan R., and Reiner R., *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*. Clarendon Press