

Rioting and area deprivation in Greater Manchester

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Introduction

The disturbances, riots and looting that erupted in London in August 2011 and subsequently spread to other English cities shocked both the communities in which these events occurred and those observing them from the outside. Despite the instinctive desire for quick explanations and ‘something to be done’, it is important to review thoroughly the available evidence in order to develop appropriate criminal justice and social policy responses. Data on those charged, as presented in this paper, can offer an insight into some of the dynamics of the riots and go some way to addressing key policy questions.

It has long been noted that young males and those from disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, and this is likely to be due to a combination of greater criminogenic risk and preferential attention and processing by the police (see Scraton, 2008; Squires, 2006; Klein, 2011; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Young, 2007). This paper examines the extent to which the deprivation-crime relationship holds at a local (Greater Manchester) area by analysing the extent to which rioters charged with criminal offences were disproportionately drawn from multiply deprived areas of residence.

Methods

The data used in the current study relates to 197 people charged at Manchester City magistrates court up to the 23rd August 2011 in relation to the riots; this constitutes all those charged with offences in Manchester City & Salford. While composing an authoritative public record in key respects, court data have a number of limitations: those involved but not arrested and charged may have characteristics which helped them avoid apprehension, including experience of crime; additionally, an unknown number whose cases were not quickly ready for the Magistrates Court were not recorded, but these were thought to be very few. Finally, the number of background variables available at the individual level is for reasons of confidentiality, very limited.

The data were analysed by linking the postcodes to Lower Super Output Areas and the 2008 midyear population estimates as well as 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) scores for each area. The Index of Multiple Deprivation is a composite measure of deprivation

indexing variables such as access to housing services, crime, health, income, living environment, employment and education (Department for Communities and Local Government 2011). We report characteristics of the data as a whole where possible, however, geographic analyses, entailed some case attrition: 153 of the 197 cases (77.7%) had valid postcodes, of which all but six lie within Greater Manchester and were used in analysis. Six of those without postcodes are recorded as No Fixed Address (NFA). The 147 remaining cases represent 74.6% of the original 197 cases available, and we have no reason to believe that they are biased in a way that would invalidate the summary description of our results; ‘unpostcodable’ addresses remain a perennial and relatively random feature of criminal justice data.

Findings

General properties of charge data: The 197 defendants charged in Greater Manchester by the 23rd August 2011 represented 0.08 people per 1000 population. The youngest defendant was 12 years of age and the eldest 58; with the average age of those charged being 23.8 years (SD=9.5). Around one in ten (10.2%; 20 cases) of those charged were under the age of 16. The majority of those charged were male (86.3%, 170 cases). Where an offence classification was available (195 cases), over two thirds (131 charges, 67.2%) were for burglary offences (including two that also involved violence or drugs), another 61 cases (31.3%) were for violent offences (including five cases that also involved burglary) and 3 further offences were for drug related offences (1.5%; see figure 1). Where more than one offence was recorded, the first charge was used.

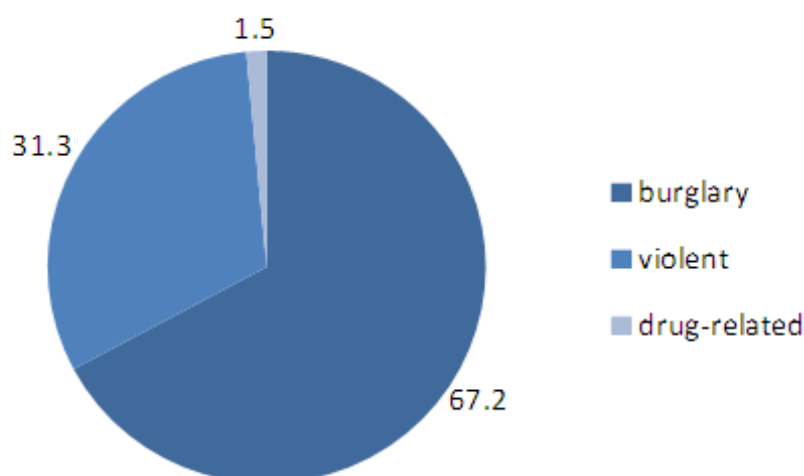


Figure 1: Breakdown (%) of charges in Greater Manchester by offence type (N=195)

Charges by areas of deprivation (IMD deciles): Table 1 below presents the number charged according to the deprivation score of their area of residence. All Manchester LSOAs have been ranked on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), so that a tenth of the population lives in each category (decile). This displays two very clear results: (1) some people are charged from areas of every level of deprivation, from very low to very high and (2) most are charged from areas of higher deprivation, with over a third (36.1%) of all those charged in the most deprived decile group. This relationship also holds across offence type, with over a third (33.7%) of those charged with burglary resident in LSOAs in the most deprived IMD decile (10); and the clear majority (84/101 cases, 83.2%) resident in the five most deprived deciles. The corresponding figures for those charged with violent offences was 43.2% (most deprived decile), and 86.4% (five most deprived deciles) respectively.

IMD decile of area of residence	total charged <i>n</i> (%)	charged with burglary <i>n</i> (%)	charged with a violent offence <i>n</i> (%)
1 (least deprived)	2 (1.4)	1 (0.9)	1 (2.3)
2	4 (2.7)	2 (1.9)	2 (4.5)
3	3 (2)	3 (2.9)	0 (0)
4	6 (4.1)	4 (3.9)	1 (2.3)
5	9 (6.1)	7 (6.9)	2 (4.5)
6	15 (10.2)	13 (12.9)	2 (4.5)
7	15 (10.2)	10 (9.9)	4 (9.1)
8	18 (12.2)	13 (12.9)	5 (11.4)
9	22 (15)	14 (13.9)	8 (18.2)
10	53 (36.1)	34 (33.7)	19 (43.2)
Total	147 (100)	101 (100)	44 (100)

Table 1: Numbers charged in total and for two offence types categorised by IMD decile of area of residence (Source: Greater Manchester Police Press Office and Manchester Magistrate's Court)

This relationship is further underlined in the map originally co-produced with BBC News (Easton, 6th September 2011) and reproduced with permission as Figure 2; those charged were disproportionately resident in highly deprived areas.

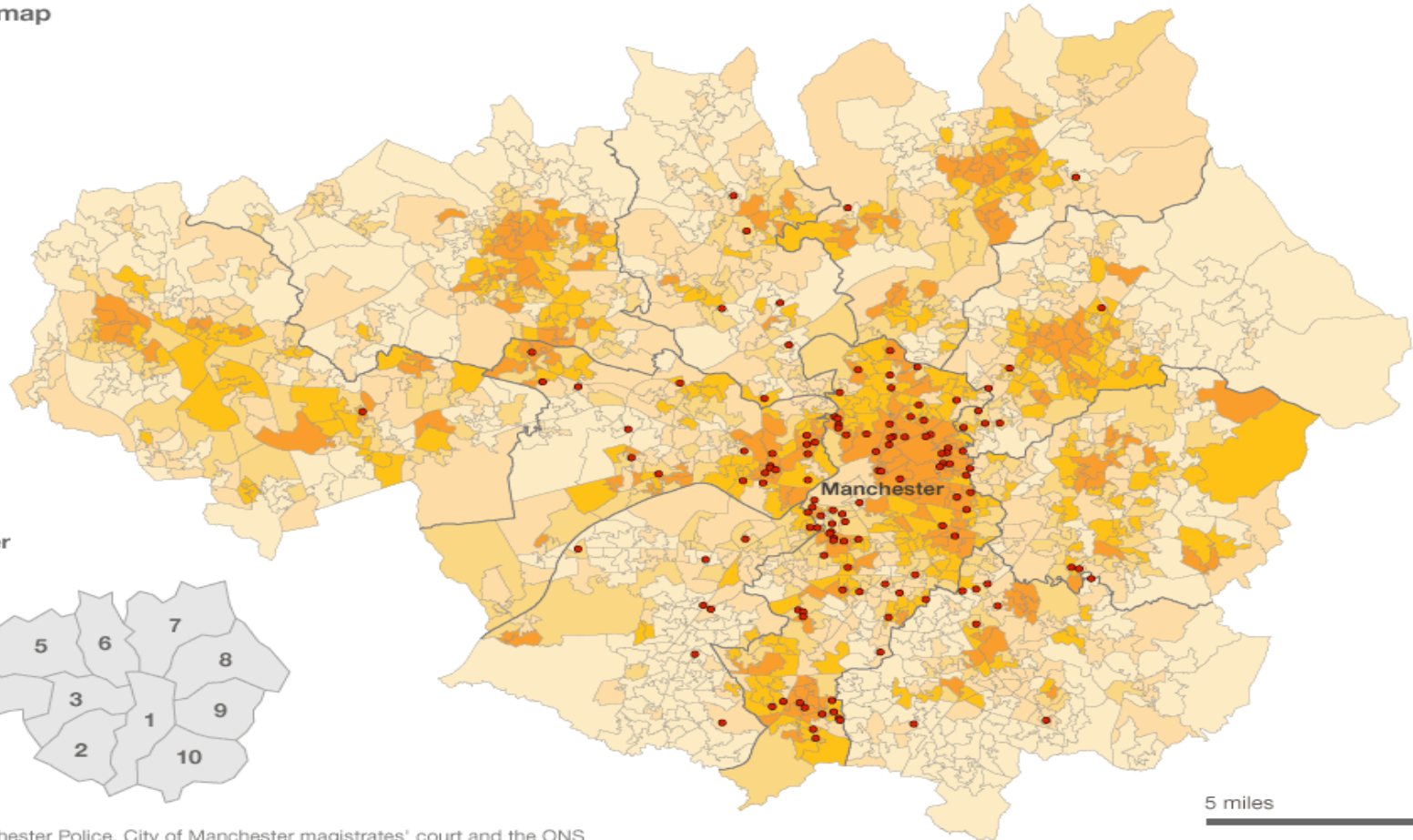
Manchester riot map

Most deprived



Least deprived

● Where those charged live



Greater Manchester

- 1 Manchester
- 2 Trafford
- 3 Salford
- 4 Wigan
- 5 Bolton
- 6 Bury
- 7 Rochdale
- 8 Oldham
- 9 Tameside
- 10 Stockport



Sources: Greater Manchester Police, City of Manchester magistrates' court and the ONS

Figure 2: Map of home addresses of 197 people charged with riot-related offences at Manchester City Magistrates Court up until 23 August, plotted against levels of deprivation (IMD score) by Super Output Areas.

We have no reason to suspect systematic bias in our results, however, the preceding figures could mislead in that they relate to area of residence, not individual income, and one would be guilty of committing the 'ecological fallacy' if one assumed that people living in poor areas were themselves poor. Though not decomposed by region, far more extensively-linked Ministry of Justice (October 24th 2011) figures relating to all riot-related court appearances does, however, confirm that individuals were generally socially excluded: 35% of the 1468 adults charged were claiming out of work benefit (vs. 12% nationally); and 42% of the 516 juveniles charged were in receipt of free school meals (vs. 16% nationally).

Discussion and interpretation

The findings highlight a clear association between deprivation of area of residence and the likelihood of being involved in and charged for crimes relating to the disturbances. While some of those charged were from well-off areas, rioters were five times more likely to come from the 50% of areas that are most deprived than the 50% of areas that are least deprived. A third of those charged were from the top 10% most deprived areas in Greater Manchester. These patterns were replicated for both burglary and violent offences and are reflective of criminal justice statistics more widely.

As deprivation was neither necessary nor sufficient for explaining involvement in the riots (some rioters were from affluent areas; most people living in deprived areas did not riot), careful consideration of the problem is required in order to avoid simplistic explanations based on models of uncontextualised individual choice and moral irresponsibility. Examples of this can be seen in the statements immediately issued by Justice Secretary Kenneth Clark suggesting the riots were the actions of a 'feral underclass' (Lewis et al, September 5th 2011), and in David Cameron's 'broken society' rhetoric that stressed a tautological 'explanation' of the riots being due to 'criminality, pure and simple' (The Guardian, 9th August 2011). A more considered criminological interpretation of the riot data presented above would point to a century's worth of research suggesting that structurally-stressed (poor, residentially mobile) communities experience higher levels of crime for a number of reasons. These include: (i) the fact that ecological stress impacts on family socialisation processes in ways that increase the likelihood of childhood behavioural problems and associated school failure (e.g., Margolin & Gordis 2000); (ii) the fact that similarly-labelled 'troublesome' children and young people more often associate in oppositional subcultures that amplify behavioural problems (e.g., Thornberry et al 1993); and (iii) the fact that stressed communities find it harder to create the social cohesion and informal social control

that limits opportunities to offend (e.g., Sampson 2006). High levels of police-recorded crime in a community are also partly an artefact of tautologically-justified over-policing: resources are devoted to detection in an area, so more crime is detected, so resources are maintained or increased, and so on (see the particular use and justification of 'stop and search' in BME communities; Bowling & Phillips 2003). While family, group and community-level processes have their own dynamics, over-policing risks further labelling individuals, families and whole communities, with the effect of alienating residents and undermining confidence in the criminal justice system (Fagan & Tyler 2008). It would also seem socially unjust to target impoverished communities with 'deterrent' measures when they are not adopted for other more powerful sections of society who have engaged in fraudulent and criminal behaviour (see, e.g., Klein, 2011; Nelken, 1997).

Effective engagement with politically marginalised and disempowered communities is likely to be central to finding an effective solution. Indeed, Low (2011, p.3) reviews the evidence in relation to poverty, social exclusion and the criminal behaviour and identifies that "community organisations are vital for transforming neighbourhoods". It would seem sensible to suggest that more work needs to be done by police and criminal justice agencies to develop stronger community relations and policies in order to gain support from the affected communities.

Conclusions

In summary, the evidence reviewed here suggests an association between deprivation of area of residence and likelihood of having been charged in relation to the riots in Greater Manchester. This raises vitally important questions about how social and criminal justice policy might best address the problem of disadvantage and marginalisation in order to prevent further disorder, unrest and criminal behaviour.

Given that court data indicated 'exemplary sentences' were being employed (Gallagher 2011), there appears to have been a politically-pressured 'rush to punishment' that does not acknowledge the structural roots of the problem or the counter-productivity of 'get tough' policies designed largely to appease voters' concerns. The corrosive impact of criminal justice contact (see e.g., Farrington et al 1978; McAra & McVie 2008) - especially for those people who have not previously been involved with criminal justice - together with the evidence that longer prison sentences exacerbate crime as opposed to deterring it (see e.g., Gendreau et al 1999) suggests a need to balance punishment away from custody and towards more restorative and

community justice disposals. Societies that believe they can 'police' or 'punish away' problems associated with deep and pervasive social exclusion, particularly in the context of worsening economic conditions and record youth unemployment, are likely only exacerbate and extend them.

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