Crime seems to be a fairly straightforward topic to study initially. However, it is as complicated, if not more complicated, than other sociological topics. Crime can be defined simply as acts that are against the law. It cannot be studied as easily though. Crime is not fixed. It varies over time and space, making it more difficult (but also more interesting!) to study.

One particular aspect on all A-level courses that must be considered is patterns of crime. This is a substantial area as it addresses the following –

• What are the trends in reported crime?
• What are the trends in recorded crime?
• Where does crime take place?
• Who commits crime?

The questions above are crucial in studying crime at A-level in sociology. An equally, if not more important issue when addressing these questions, is to take into consideration how we get the information to answer them. This of course, is from official statistics and with these we must consider ‘the dark figure of crime’. In other words, when we consider the statistics provided by official organisations, we must also think about what is NOT included in the statistics.

This Factsheet provides an outline of answers to the four key questions above and also provides an evaluation of official statistics in the study of crime. It also extends slightly beyond most texts by bringing the issue of crime up-to-date by providing information on new crimes, with particular emphasis on technological crimes. It is useful to students studying either the AQA, OCR or WJEC specification and is particularly relevant in the following modules

AQA – Module 6 – Crime and Deviance option
OCR – Unit 2536 – Power and Control – Crime and Deviance option
WJEC – Unit 4 – Social Control – Crime and Deviance option

Exam Hint:– Remember to link crime and deviance to other topics that you study at both AS and A2. This is particularly important for AQA students as module 6 is your synoptic unit. However, this can be done by OCR and WJEC students as it is good practice for your synoptic units and good sociology. Remember, it is the study of society and therefore difficult to think about crime without considering other issues such as education, culture and socialisation, poverty, media, religion, etc.

Where do crime statistics come from?
The statistics that sociologists most often use in the study of crime are:

• Official statistics (collected in the main by the Home Office but also other organisations such as the National Centre for Social Research)
• Victim surveys (where a sample of the population are asked if they have been victims of crimes in a set period of time)
• Self-report studies (where a sample of the population are asked about if they have committed offences in a set period of time)

What are the trends in reported crime?
Reported crime is that which is brought to the attention of the authorities by witnesses and victims.

According the British Crime Survey (BCS), 70% of all crimes are estimated to be reported.

According to the Home Office, the level of reported crime has remained fairly constant since 1995. Not all types of crime are reported in equal measures. Certain types of crime are more reported and others less reported.

So why are some crimes reported more/less than others?
Thief of vehicles is the most reported crime according to the Home Office – the explanation for this is obvious. A car is an expensive possession and therefore insured. For an insurance claim to be made, the victim must report the crime in order to obtain a crime number for the insurance claim to be processed.

The next most reported crime tends to be burglary where items have been stolen. Again, this is due to the offence being one that involves material items that are often insured and a crime number will be required to make a claim on these items as well as damaged property.

Violent crimes have been more reported in recent years. In 1999 36% were reported, in 2005 this had increased to 68%. Reasons for this could include more trust in the police/justice system, or violent crimes becoming more violent, or involving more theft.

In the year 2005-2006 BCS found that 42% of the criminal incidents committed were reported, in 2005 this had increased to 68%. Reasons for this are obvious. A car is an expensive possession and therefore insured. For an insurance claim to be processed.

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In the year 2005-2006 BCS found that 42% of the criminal incidents against the people surveyed were reported to the police. This is less than half. So more than half of those victims decided not to report a crime (or crimes) committed against them. This 58% ‘gap’ illustrates one way in which ‘dark figure of crime’ occurs. The crimes that tend not to be reported by victims are common assault, theft from the person and vandalism, according to the BCS.

Reasons for crimes not being reported include that victims think the crimes are too trivial, that they believe the police will not do anything, that there was no material loss and that the crime is too personal. This last reason includes domestic violence and rape, which are crimes that have always been under-reported due to their personal nature, fear of reprisals and lack of confidence in the justice system.
What are the trends in recorded crime?
Recorded crime is that which is put on file by police. Some will be detected by the police themselves, some will be reported by the general public. However, not all crime reported by the public will be recorded by the police for various reasons.

Sociological study
Holdaway (1983) carried out participant observation and found that the police work selectively, with occupational culture influencing their priorities. He found for example, that minor offences may be neglected to avoid additional paperwork and that arrests may be made hastily so that officers could return to the station in order to escape from bad conditions outside. Holdaway’s overall finding was that police officers are in a position of authority to exercise ‘discretion’ in the way they work.

Unlike reported crime, which is said to have remained steady, recorded crime has seen more significant trends. Largely, this is due to the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS), which was introduced in 2002 and meant that low-level anti-social behaviour that had not previously been included started being recorded as violent crime.

This is one explanation for violent crime being reported more in the previous few years (see previous page) as people became more aware that police had to deal with minor anti-social crimes, not just high-level violence. The consequence of this initiative is that there has been an increase in the amount of recorded violent crime.

The general pattern made available to the public is that although recorded violent crime is increasing, recorded crime in general is decreasing. There are differences in the types of crime recorded, just as there are with the types of crime reported.

According to the BCS with figures for the year up to September 2005, vehicle thefts and burglaries are most likely to be recorded. However, burglary was less recorded than in 2004 (a decrease to 64% from 77%) and if burglary did not involve material loss then only 36% were recorded in the year up to September 2005.

Apart from burglary, other crimes that had decreased on police records in the year 2004-2005 included bicycle theft, robbery and common assault with no injury. In comparison, recordings of wounding increased.

Probably the most significant point about the recording of crime by the police, is that the BCS always estimates a higher figure for every type of crime. In the year up to September 2005 there were 3,349,000 comparable crimes recorded by the police according to official statistics. The BCS estimates that this figure of comparable crimes committed was actually 8,558,000. This illustrates yet another gap in the crime figures – not all crime that is reported is recorded and not all crime is identified, therefore contributing to the ‘dark figure of crime’.

Where does crime take place?
Locality is a key issue when thinking about the patterns of crime. Crimes are more likely to happen in some areas than others. Furthermore, certain types of crimes are more likely to occur in some places and less in others.

Summary of geographical data found in the 2005-2006 British Crime Survey:

- The more urban an area, the more crime occurs. Rural areas tend to be relatively free of crime.
- Crime occurs more in deprived areas.
- The risk of being a victim of personal crime in England and Wales was 6%. For London it was higher at 8% and for the more rural areas of the South West and Wales, it was 5%.
- The area with the highest rate of burglary was Yorkshire and the Humber (16 per 1,000 of the population). The average for England and Wales was 12 per 1,000 of the population.
- Slightly more than 20% of recorded violent crimes took place in the London region.

Table showing summary of total offences by region (information taken from BSC 2005-2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total number of offences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>257,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>783,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humber</td>
<td>596,905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>436,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>521,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern region</td>
<td>471,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London region</td>
<td>992,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East region</td>
<td>728,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West region</td>
<td>433,376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>258,309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total for England &amp; Wales</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,480,128</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the table above it is clear to see that certain regions of England and Wales experience more crime than others.
- The highest number of offences recorded in 2005-2006 occurred in the London region. This figure was 992,557.
- The lowest number of offences was recorded in the North East (257,053), followed then by Wales (258,309).

However, the table does not show differences that occur within the areas. For example, in the North East, crime is likely to be higher in the cities of Newcastle, Sunderland, Durham and Middlesbrough. In the North West, crime is more likely to occur in Manchester and Liverpool, two large cities.

Population figures should also be accounted for. The crime figure for London is exceptionally high and those of Wales and the North exceptionally low in comparison to other areas but the number of people living in London is also high and the number living in Wales and the North East is lower than elsewhere in the country.

Sociological study
Shaw and McKay (1942) as far back as the 1930s and 1940s carried out research that used an ecological approach to crime. They found that the highest crime rates occurred in the city centre and decreased with distance away from the city centre.
19. Patterns of Crime

Who commits crime?
When considering who commits crime, sociologists use the social characteristics of gender, ethnicity, social class and age to identify trends and make comparisons. The table below provides a summary of the evidence and also some questions for you to use as starting points for criticism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social characteristic</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Critical questioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Age**               | • Those between the age of 14 and 24 carry out most crime.  
• Young people are more likely to be convicted in court. | Is it that this age group are more likely to be caught because they are less experienced?  
Is it that this age group are more visible and therefore more likely to be caught?  
Is it that this age group are more likely to be targeted by the police?  
Is this due to a lack of money to pay for expensive legal help? |
| **Gender**            | • The crime rates for men are higher than those for women.  
• Male prisoners make up 94% of the average daily prison population (Morgan, 2002).  
• Crime among women is rising because of changes in equality, the feminist movement and women being more likely to suffer hardship. | Do men get caught more?  
Do woman get convicted less?  
Are women more likely to get sentences alternative to prison, such as fines or community service?  
Why do men still far outnumber women in the crime statistics? |
| **Ethnicity**         | • Ethnic minority males are over-represented in crime statistics.  
• 19% of male prisoners and 25% of female prisoners are of an ethnic minority background even though ethnic minority people account for only 8% of the population.  
• Black males in particular commit more crime. | Is this because the types of crime they commit are more visible?  
Are there racist/discriminatory processes in operation in the justice system?  
Is this because of inability to pay for legal expenses? Is it because the justice system is less lenient towards ethnic minority people?  
Are stereotypes in operation?  
What role do the media play? |
| **Social class**      | • Working class people appear more in crime statistics.  
• White-collar crime is treated more leniently because it is often seen as ‘victimless’. | Is this because they are targeted more?  
Could it be because the crimes are more visible?  
Are white-collar crimes really ‘victimless’?  
Fraud, neglect of health and safety laws, etc. affect companies but also individuals. |

Sociological studies

Walmsley et al. (1992), in conducting the National Prison Survey, found that 40% of male prisoners left school before the age of 16. 11% of the whole male population left school before the age of 16.

Allen (1989) suggests that there is a ‘chivalry factor’ in operation in the justice system, where female offenders are treated more leniently.

Pollack (1950) argues that female offending is ‘masked’ because much female crime goes undetected or unreported because of the types of crime they commit and where they are committed. He claimed that this included shoplifting, illegal abortions, prostitution, poisoning relatives and child abuse.

Hall et al. (1978) argue that the picture of black crime is distorted because of inaccurate statistics and media reporting.

The Macpherson investigation (1999) was carried out following the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, who was black. The investigation concluded that the Metropolitan Police force was institutionally racist and as a result the murderers were not held accountable.

The Home Office (2002) found that black people were eight times more likely than white people to be stopped and searched by the police.

Gordon (1976) argues that the law is enforced selectively and reporting in the media is selective, therefore giving the impression that criminals are mainly working class.

Bonger (1916) suggests that crime is inevitable in capitalist society, that it is a response to extreme wealth for some and poverty for others. Therefore, individuals are ‘forced’ into crime.

Exam hint :- When writing essays try to follow a sentence/paragraph that makes a statement or statements with a sentence/paragraph that provides evaluation. To help with this, start evaluative sentences with words/phrases such as –

"However..."  
"On the other hand..."  
"In contrast..."  
"In comparison..."  
"A strength of this is..."  
"A weakness of this is..."  
"Other research has shown..."  
"[insert sociologist’s name] suggests differently..."