

Other Effects of Media on Public Perceptions of Crime (2)

(CONTINUED FROM MORAL PANIC)

2) CHANGING PUBLIC CONCERNS AND ATTITUDE

The example of mods and rockers (previous worksheet,) goes to show that the public's concerns are clearly influenced by the Media. There are many examples of this, one of the most recent ones is the public attitude to Muslims. Since the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York reporting on Muslims has been overwhelmingly negative. This in turn has led to a rise in Islamophobia amongst some sections of the population

Research into the reporting of Muslims and Islam in UK news media. Islam and Muslims were often reported alongside words such as **fundamentalist**, **terrorist** and **extremist**. The term 'Muslim community' was used to portray Muslims as a homogenous group i.e. all the same. Newspapers used various devices to portray Muslims as dangerous such as the use of **mugshots**. The reporting of Islam and Muslims became increasingly negative, and **positive stories** about Muslims, and stories where Muslims were **the victims of aggression** decreased



Identify three different ways that the reporting of Muslims and Islam in the media is negative -

One way in which reporting of Islam and Muslims in the media is negative is _____

Another way is _____

Finally, the reporting of Muslims/Islam is negative because _____

3) CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME TRENDS

What the public thinks is happening with crime

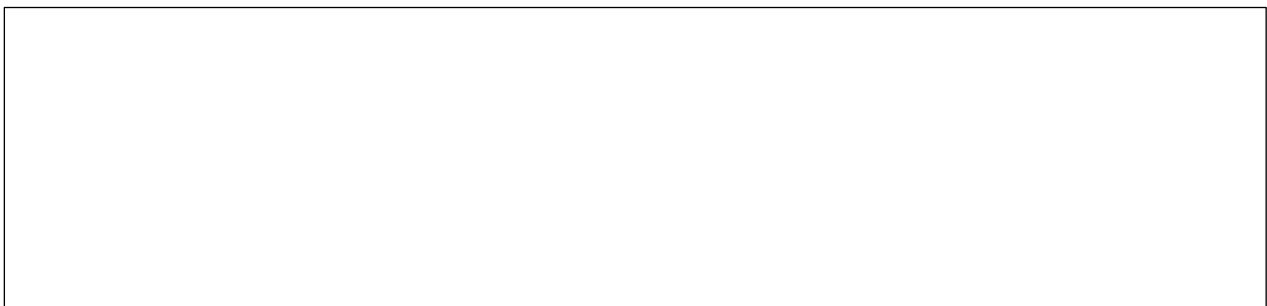
- AROUND ONE IN 6 ADULTS (60%) PERCEIVE THAT CRIME HAS RISEN OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS
- NEWS PROGRAMMES ON TV AND RADIO WERE MOST OFTEN CITED AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION THAT HAD INFLUENCED PERCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL CRIME LEVELS (CITED BY 67% OF PEOPLE). (OFFICE OF NATIONAL STATISTICS).
- ONE REASON FOR THIS MAY BE THAT CRIME REPORTING IS MUCH MORE PREVALENT NOW, ESPECIALLY INTERPERSONAL CRIMES SUCH AS VIOLENCE OR SEXUAL CRIMES.
- THERE HAVE BEEN SOME INCREASES FOR CERTAIN TYPES OF CRIME (E.G., SEXUAL ASSAULTS); HOWEVER, THIS HAS BEEN MAINLY BEEN A RESULT OF CHANGES TO HOW THE POLICE RECORD INCIDENTS.

What is actually happening with the crime rate in England and Wales



4) STEREOTYPES OF CRIMINALS

Characteristics of criminals as seen by the police



Note that police officers see these characteristics going together, so somebody who has one of these characteristics for example at BAME background is likely to have the other characteristics.

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy



5) CHANGING PRIORITIES AND EMPHASIS

Another effect of the media and public perceptions of crime is that it can lead to changes in policing policy or the law. One example of this was the **Dangerous Dogs Act** (DDA, 1991)

THE Dangerous Dogs ACT 1991 (Background)

In 1990/91 tabloid newspapers carried reports on Rottweiler's and Pitbull terriers that had mauled and sometimes killed children. The language of these reports was sensational and emotive – typical headlines included 'savage' and 'muzzle these devil dogs', reports often included gory photographs of victims. Media coverage labelling Pitbulls as 'devil dogs' encouraged the view that they posed a widespread and serious threat. As a result, the Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker, felt it was necessary to push emergency legislation through Parliament - The Dangerous Dogs Act (DDA) in August 1991. The DDA made it illegal to own, breed Pitbulls and three other breeds. Dogs found to be illegal would be destroyed and the owner could be jailed for up to 6 months.

Why was the DDA criticised?

Campaigners against the law pointed out that the section one of the act, which outlaws certain breeds, such as pit bull terriers, and calls for them to be destroyed was likely to have **unintended consequences**. Banning those breeds would make them more attractive to the sort of individual who might not make responsible owners, thereby defeating the point of the ban in the first place. A campaigner said "Banning breeds inevitably makes them more desirable for the wrong kind of person. "Pit bulls and Staffie crosses are now so common that people are inevitably moving on to the next thing – huskies, molosos, presca canarios. We can't add every dog to a banned list. "We need to look at why people are getting these dogs." There was also a problem with **animal welfare**. Hundreds of dogs were put down under section one of the act – not because they have any record of wrongdoing, but simply because their breed is outlawed. Many people argued this was cruel and unnecessary, some adopted the slogan – "the deed, NOT the breed".

There were other problems too - the act did not allow for any **discretion** on the part of police - any officer who failed to take action against a suspected illegal breed could be punished for aiding and abetting. Also, the 1991 act is that it doesn't apply on **private property**. No matter how irresponsible the dog owner, they can only be prosecuted if the attack happens on public land. This is particularly difficult for postal workers who are legally obliged to deliver mail to every home in the country, as well as midwives and other public servants.

Problems with the 1991 (DDA)

Problem (1) –

Problem (2) –

Problem (3) -

Research Activity: The 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act

(A) WHY WAS IT INTRODUCED?

(B) WHY WAS IT CRITICISED?

(C) WHAT DID IT HAVE IN COMMON WITH THE DDA?

6) LEVELS OF RESPONSE TO CRIME AND TYPES OF PUNISHMENT

The media can have a major effect on the types of punishments that are given by the courts to crime. One such example is the UK Riots of 2011. A [report in the Guardian](#) (Guardian Newspaper - Alan Travis and Simon Rogers, 18 Aug 2011) suggests that the sentences handed out to rioters were unusually harsh. This was in part a reaction to Media calls for stiff sentencing for those involved. Some of the key findings were that

- 56 defendants of the 80 who have already been sentenced by magistrates were given immediate prison terms. This 70% rate of imprisonment compares with a "normal" rate of just 2% in magistrates' courts.
- Public order offences are leading to sentences were -33% longer than normal and those convicted of assaulting police officers have been jailed for 40% longer than usual.

Other notable examples include:

- A man sentenced to six months in prison for stealing a £3.50 case of water
- And a young woman sentenced to 10 months in a young offenders' institution for stealing two left-footed trainers
- Two men sentenced to four years in prison for inciting a riot (that never took place) on Facebook

Research Task: The Changing Status of Laws Relating to Possession of Cannabis

Research Task: The Changing Status of Laws Relating to Possession of Cannabis

(a) How has this changed in recent years?

(b) What is the role of the media in this?