

Crimes, victims and the workplace

Martin Gill examines victimisation in the workplace.

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Traditionally, there has been little interest in studying crime and the workplace. With some notable exceptions much of the interest from criminologists has been on crime committed by business, or by white collar offenders committing fraud usually for personal gain, while those working in the area of victimology have been more interested in the plight of the more obviously vulnerable groups. Even within the field of business/management studies crime remains a marginal concern. Clearly, research showing the impact that crime can have on the bottom line has yet to find its way into teaching in business schools.

Why more research?

However, there is some evidence that the gap is being recognised and filled as contributors to three edited collections illustrate (Felson and Clarke, 1997; Gill, 1994; 1998). In recent years a range of

surveys have assessed levels of victimisation which, as will be discussed, are instructive. This research is important, not least for the gaps in knowledge it highlights about the vulnerability of a key part of the community. The remainder of this paper aims to suggest why more research is needed, and will illustrate this with reference to the risks of employees; the levels and patterns of victimisation and the lessons for prevention, and the impact of the costs of crime.

Despite the fact that some shop thieves, vandals and dishonest staff see the workplace as a legitimate target, it is important to remember that workplaces contain people, and at least some types of offences are very distressing to those who are victimised. In the case of violence this is especially true, and often it is the workers who are paid the least who are most at risk. In the retail sector, this includes sales assistants, amongst the lowest paid and often in temporary jobs, and frequently women. One study the author carried out with colleagues at the Scarman Centre found that one in nine staff had been attacked in the year. Some did not report the

matter because they felt that they might be blamed or because they felt that they had in some way contributed to their own victimisation. Indeed, one recent survey found that only 12.2% of incidents of verbal abuse were reported (Gill, 1998a). Thus official figures neatly disguise the real levels of victimisation for this type of offence.

A high level of victimisation

Yet there is a growing body of research which is showing that levels of victimisation of businesses are comparatively high. In the context of community safety, where strategies are being developed to combat community-wide problems, it is important to understand the nature of this risk, especially since some organisations are more at risk of some types of crime than others, and the evidence suggests that crime is concentrated. For example, it is possible to compare the findings of a survey conducted by Gill (1998a) with those of a survey by Wood et al. (1997). The methodologies and approach of the surveys (and in some cases the classifications) were quite different, as with the focus, but the findings are instructive.

Further research has identified the variables that are most closely linked to being at risk, and location is crucial (see papers by Bowers and Hirschfield; Hopkins and Tilley, in Gill, 1998); so is the type of sector, with retailers being more at risk than manufacturers (Mirlees-Black and Ross, 1995). More specifically, Gill (1998a) found, unsurprisingly that retailers were more at risk of theft, vehicle crime was most common in the transport sector, arson in the agricultural sector, while workers in businesses in the hotel and catering sector were more at risk of assault. However, much more research is needed to identify crime patterns as a basis for developing the most appropriate solutions.

The concentration of crime - the surveys compared

Gill 1998a Survey (Forum of Private Business)	Wood et al 1997 Survey (Small Business Crime Initiative)
3.7% of businesses suffered 92.0% of verbal abuse	9% of businesses suffered 92% of threats, abuse and intimidation
13.1% of businesses suffered 88.2% of vandalism	11% of businesses suffered 76% of criminal damage
4.7% of businesses suffered 86.1% of customer fraud	17% of businesses suffered 83% of fraud
12.4% of businesses suffered 75.5% of burglary	17% of businesses suffered 69% of burglary
4.7% of businesses suffered 68.3% of vehicle theft	8% of businesses suffered 65% of transport losses
0.4% of businesses suffered 39.3% of physical assault	3% of businesses suffered 81% of violent attacks
0.3% of businesses suffered 38.9% of robbery	1% of businesses suffered 45% of robbery

(for a fuller version of the surveys see Gill 1998a)

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Solutions

Solutions, not least technical ones, are commonly used by organisations, and much could be gleaned from studying their experience with measures such as closed circuit television, electronic article surveillance, and even private patrols (to name but a few), all of which are becoming more common in communities. Indeed, within organisations and especially the bigger companies, security managers are common. At least some of their responsibility usually includes crime management and crime prevention. The subject area of security management has gained recognition in universities on the international stage; it has its own well established journal (the *Security Journal*). Yet, rarely do scholars from crime prevention and security management refer to each others' field of study (see Gill, 1994; Gill, 1998), and a major opportunity is being missed to learn lessons of wider benefit which is only now being addressed.

Organisations are learning that crime can be expensive, leading some to relocate and others to fail altogether. When this happens, as Tilley (1993) notes, locals are deprived of services (which may be particularly problematic for those less able to travel elsewhere such as the elderly or disabled) and employment opportunities are lost. However, the real or total impact of crime is rarely considered which in addition to the costs of items lost or damaged will include, replacement, medical, and administrative costs, as well as the cost of securing (and insuring) against further attacks. If staff are affected by the crime they may need counselling and time off; if they leave there are additional recruitment and training costs in addition to the impact this may have on the image of the company from staff, customers or the community at large (see Wood et al, 1997).

Today there is a legal as well as a moral requirement to provide a safe working environment and employers may be liable in civil law if they are shown to have been

negligent. Not only do all crimes take place at work, but anyone either as a worker, a contractor or a visitor may be a victim of workplace crime and risks vary. The costs can have a serious impact, invariably passed on to customers and again affecting those in the community who can least afford it. Meanwhile, the workplace offers an opportunity to learn lessons about why and how different measures succeed and fail, and this opportunity is not being exploited to its full extent. A lot of work has been undertaken, but much more needs to be done, and there could be important lessons for crime prevention and community safety. ■

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The search for truth and justice

Eugene McLaughlin explores the consequences of the Lawrence Inquiry for victims of racist violence.

The report into matters arising from the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in south London on 22 April 1993 will be the most radical official statement on race, policing and criminal justice ever produced in this country. The well-trailed leaks and 'exclusives' emanating from various sources in the countdown to publication indicate that no part of the criminal justice system will remain untouched by the proposals emanating from the inquiry chaired by Sir William MacPherson. Furthermore, given that there is no aspect of the case that reflects well upon the Metropolitan Police, it is inevitable that the document will be withering in its criticism of the force. Individual officers will be 'named and shamed' for their mishandling of the investigation. The report will also have to draft a credible answer to the dynamite question of whether police errors were due to incompetence, institutional racism or corruption.

Upon publication, there will be broad agreement that the inquiry team did a remarkable job in ensuring that the available evidence was examined. The report will be lauded in certain circles as proof that the British criminal justice system is capable

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of responding to and rectifying injustices. However, there is also the distinct possibility that the desperate official need to draw a veil over this case will ride roughshod over the meaning and historical context of the Stephen Lawrence campaign and ignore the fact that the Metropolitan Police is an organisation still in deep denial.

The historical context of the Stephen Lawrence campaign

The official discourses of ‘let’s look to the future’ and ‘that was then, this is now’, which were very evident in police submissions to the inquiry, have the potential to inaugurate a process of official closure whereby it will be conveniently forgotten that the establishment of the inquiry was the result of a deep sense of injustice and a painful drawn out process to have the full truth made known. The media’s stress on this being a particular and unique case has, to a considerable degree, already disconnected the Stephen Lawrence campaign from the wider context of a history of similar but less successful campaigns emanating from black communities which, in the post war period, stretch back to the unsolved racist murder of Kelso Cochrane in Notting Hill on 17 May 1959. The Stephen Lawrence campaign, like the ones preceding it, faced official inertia and denial and its refusal to forget had to survive three murder investigations, a private prosecution, an inquest, and a Police Complaints Authority investigation before an official inquiry was established. Anyone who attended the inquiry at Hannibal House soon realised that something quite extraordinary was unfolding. The Lawrence’s campaign had constructed a conjunctural space within which:

- the murder of their son and the failure to convict his killers

was being successfully transformed from a private tragedy into a matter of urgent public importance;

- previous campaigns for justice, forgotten by the media and ignored by the authorities, could assert their right to be heard;
- the police discourses that had constructed and reconstructed young black men such as Stephen Lawrence and Duwayne Brooks as street criminals or as a potential public order problem were ruptured;
- the MacPherson inquiry was being forced to operate as a *de facto* Truth Commission in which the concerns of black communities could be publicly articulated and acknowledged;
- the ‘hidden wiring’ of the Metropolitan Police was subjected to unprecedented public scrutiny and commentary.

Every effort must be made to ensure that the conjunctural space created by the Lawrence campaign remains open because the authorities will do everything in their power to ensure that such an inquiry never takes place again.

A police force in deep denial

So how will the Metropolitan Police respond to the report? The reaction will reflect an organisation that, despite all the claims to the contrary, is still in denial about the murder investigation. From the beginning of the inquiry in March 1998, the Metropolitan Police was only too aware that it was engaged in a battle of strength with the legal teams representing the Lawrence family and Duwayne Brooks. As the weeks passed, it became clear that the police version of events was a shadow without substance and that its officers had a woefully inadequate understanding of how

racial discourses were embedded in and constitutive of police work. At this point, the force tried to rupture the Lawrences’ version of what happened and attempted to deploy a series of shields that would hopefully deflect media attention from police failings. The various legal teams representing the police sought to expose the contradictions in the statements of Duwayne Brooks and drive a wedge between the testimony of Doreen and Neville Lawrence. They also endeavoured to discredit the family solicitor, Imran Khan, by positing that, because he had a ‘hidden agenda’, he had deliberately damaged relations between the family and police officers and given them incorrect advice over the private prosecution. In so doing, the police would be able to resurrect allegations that political groups, determined to transform Stephen Lawrence into a martyr for their cause, had hijacked the Lawrence family.

Sir Paul Condon intervened in April 1998, complaining that police witnesses were being ‘pilloried’ by a ‘barrage’ of heavy-handed cross-examination that could seriously damage relations between the police and black Londoners. He also stated that a very different picture would emerge when the initial statements by Mr and Mrs Lawrence were cross-examined in detail and senior officers had given their evidence. The Metropolitan Police Federation issued a statement in June asserting that the inquiry was politically motivated and attacking the legal counsel for the Lawrence family. In July, a blaze of publicity accompanied the setting up of a new Task Force in Racial and Violent Crime. What was remarkable is that by the end of part one of the inquiry, virtually all the defensive strategies deployed by the Metropolitan Police had backfired. Indeed, certain senior police officers gave the impression that they were doing everything in their power to discredit the force in front of the inquiry team. The subsequent decision by Condon to offer a personal public apology to Doreen and Neville Lawrence was the act of a Commissioner extremely concerned both about the collapse of the image of Scotland Yard and internal pressures

Parallel discourses

Internal schisms have been deepened as a result of the inquiry. There have been strategic discussions about ‘worst case

scenarios’ and just how much the organisation has to give in order to narrow the debate. There are also rumours of a split into two distinct camps and parallel discourses have invaded the media. The discourse of the ‘doves’, whilst registering a few reservations about specific recommendations, commits the force to the MacPherson report. The ‘doves’ stress their willingness to ‘think the unthinkable’ in accepting:

- the notion of institutional racism;
- the necessity for subjecting controversial powers such as stop and search to critical review and,
- the need for an inclusive dialogue with the community.

The ‘hawkish’ discourse views the inquiry and report as a sop to a vociferous minority in the black community who will do anything to destabilise the Metropolitan Police. It stresses that officers have been unfairly criticised and badly let down by ineffectual senior officers who hoisted the white flag of surrender without a fight. The almost inevitable ‘hawkish’ counter-reaction will:

- question the basic assumptions of the report;
- undermine some of the most important recommendations and;
- erase Stephen Lawrence from the collective memory.

We have already seen the re-emergence of a whispering campaign about the Lawrences’ version of events and a defiant insistence that any further criticism of the police is unwarranted. After all, as Metropolitan Police spokespersons constantly remind the media, its officers did not murder Stephen Lawrence. Seated in the middle of the organisational disharmony is the Commissioner, attempting the impossible task of articulating segments of both discourses simultaneously.

Conclusion

The MacPherson report will serve as a permanent reminder not only of Stephen Lawrence’s murder and the alleged killers, but also of the wretched state of the management and supervisory systems of Metropolitan Police in the early 1990s. We are deluding ourselves if we think that the Metropolitan Police can be reformed at the stroke of Sir William Macpherson’s pen. There have been many efforts to reform relations between the Metropolitan

Police and black Londoners since the Scarman report was published in 1981. The testimony given to the MacPherson inquiry provided proof that many of the much-lauded race and community policing initiatives were never executed or were ineffective. The real problem at the root of this rupture between rhetoric and reality is the cosy liberal manner in which police reform is devised. Reforms are conceived with the 'best intentions'; drafted in a manner that invariably disconnects them from the issues of concern that triggered demands for reform in the first place; implemented with promises that the police and the public can look to the future with confidence; before invariably ending in back-peddling, failure, recrimination, disillusion and denial. To break this repetitive pattern of systemic failure, new pressure points and safeguards must be instituted to hold the Metropolitan Police, the Home Office and race relations consultants to account for their actions and assurances. Unless procedural changes and initiatives are statutorily watertight there is no possibility of imagining a new era of police-public relations. Given the degree of dissonance within the Metropolitan Police, a better approach may be to 'time tag' proposed changes and subject their implementation to external monitoring, systematic review and public verification.

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The British Crime Survey 1998: key findings on victimisation in England and Wales

The British Crime Survey (BCS) measures crimes against people living in private households in England and Wales. It has been conducted seven times since 1982. The most recent sweep of the survey was in 1998 when 14,947 people aged 16 and above were interviewed. Each sweep measures crime in the year preceding the survey.

The British Crime Survey provides an alternative measure of crime to offences recorded by the police. The BCS measure includes those crimes which are not reported to the police or recorded by them. In 1997, 56% of crimes measured by the BCS were not reported to the police and 46% of those reported were not recorded. The BCS count, therefore, is about four times greater than the recorded crime figure.

Trends in crime

For the crimes it covers the BCS provides a better measure of trends than police recorded crime because its count is not affected by variations in levels of reporting or recording over time. The 1998 BCS showed the first fall in crime since the survey began: an overall drop of 14% between 1995 and 1997. According to the BCS all types of property crime fell between 1995 and 1997, except attempted burglary where there was no change. For example:

- burglary with entry fell by 12% between 1995 and 1997;
- theft of a vehicle fell by 25%
- theft from a vehicle by 14%
- attempted vehicle theft by 27%
- and vandalism by 15%

Violent crime also fell by 17% between 1995 and 1997.

Risks of crime

The BCS estimates that 34% of adults were the victim of crime on at least one occasion during 1997. The risk of victimisation varies for different offences. In 1997

- 3.2% of households experienced a burglary in which the offender gained entry to the home; 2.7% an attempted burglary
- 2.1% of vehicle-owning households had a vehicle stolen and 10.2% something stolen from a vehicle
- 15.7% had a vehicle-related theft
- 4.7% of adults were victims of a violent crime

Violence

The BCS measure of violence includes wounding, robbery, common assault and snatch theft.

Sources:

The 1998 British Crime Survey England and Wales by Catriona Mirreles-Black et al. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 21/98

Burglary of Domestic Dwellings: findings from the British Crime Survey 1998 by Tracey Budd, Home Office Statistical Bulletin 4/99

Both bulletins are available from Research, Development and Statistics Directorate information and publications group, Room 201, Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT. Tel: 0171 273 2084

- 25% of all violent crime measured in 1997 involved people in domestic relationships; a further 43% involved people who were acquainted in some other way.
- Women were the victims in 70% of all domestic incidents
- Men were the victims of 83% of stranger assaults.

Burglary

Burglary made up a tenth of all BCS crimes measured in 1997. The following factors increase the risk of burglary: lack of security; low levels of occupancy; living in a detached house; living in inner city areas; living in a household in which there is a single adult and children; the head of household is young or the occupants are Asian.

20% of households burgled in 1997 were burgled more than once in the year, 7% were burgled three or more times.

In most burglaries with entry, force was used to gain entry, but in 22% the offender gained entry through an unlocked door or open window.

In 25% of burglaries, someone was at home and was aware of what was happening

In 87% of all burglaries the victims said they were emotionally affected in some way by the experience.

Acquisition of home security

Since 1992, ownership of security devices increased considerably. Between 1992 and 1998, the proportion of households with security lights more than doubled and ownership of burglar alarms almost doubled. Evidence from the BCS suggests security devices are very effective in reducing the risk of victimisation.