Why do people commit crimes?

Extended Project Qualification



Photo obtained from theguardian.com

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Introduction

My project on Why People Commit Crimes was inspired by TV programs such as Mind Hunter, Criminal Minds and Silent Witness alongside my fascination with the workings of the human mind. Reading books such as Unnatural Causes by Dr Richard Shepard (a Forensic pathologist who has examined evidence in some of the most high-profile deaths in recent history, including that of Princess Diana) and The Dark Side of the Mind by Kerry Daynes (a Consultant Forensic Psychologist in major police investigations and a trusted government advisor concerning the safe management of high-risk individuals) has furthered this interest and enriched me with an insight to investigate further. I am hoping my research will provide me a more in depth understanding of this topic and leave me with good background knowledge for whichever degree I chose to study; Criminology or Forensic Psychology, and go on to become a Youth Offender Counsellor or a Victim Advocate.

In this project I will be exploring the main reasons why crimes are committed, whether criminals are 'born or made' and if there are different factors more/ less at play in different areas/countries.

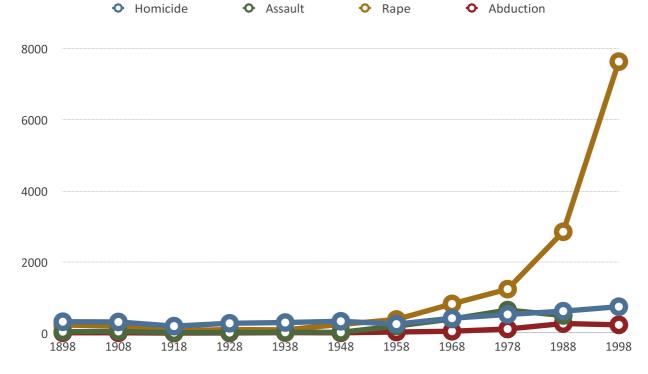
Initially, my thoughts on this subject are that there are a mixture of issues that lead people into breaking the law. This includes peoples experience of life, how they have been treated and any mental disorders that may cause them to behave in a non-law abiding manner. Peoples experience of life is anything from how they were brought up by a parent/carer, how well they did in school, their relationships with others and what job/s they have obtained. The more we research and understand criminals the more well equipped we are for finding them either before they commit a crime or after a crime has been committed. Aims

- To research the main reasons why crimes are committed
- To research the different types of crime and if there are specific causes for each one
- To research why people committed crimes in the past
- To research how mental health/genes impact peoples tendencies to break the law and why
- •To research how childhood trauma (neglect) impacts peoples tendencies to break the law and why
- To research how alcohol & drug abuse impacts peoples tendencies to break the law
- To research different causes in different countries
- To research how different levels of poverty impact peoples tendencies to break the law

Background

In the past people never tried to understand the reasons behind the crimes committed they were just focussed on revenge, and punishment that "fits the crime", this is still the case in some countries today that still have corporal punishment and the death penalty, given some are more extreme than others. The UK has always had a relatively low crime rate compared to other third world countries, this remains the same today. However, America's crime rates are also higher than the average of European countries which goes against the statistics for developed countries.

When looking at historical sources we can also see that some things we consider to be a crime today, were not considered crimes in the past; it only became law that acts based on racial discrimination were a crime in the UK in 1965 (Race Relations Act) and the use of computers to cause harm such as blackmail and hacking only became a crime by law under the Computer Misuse Act 1990. The advancements in technology and broadness of the internet's capabilities with entities such as the 'Dark Web' all provide new channels for crime and an easier access to things that would otherwise be restricted. In some cases this makes it easier to monitor crime, but at the same time it is on such a huge scale and there is hardware that can block access from law enforcement which in contrast, makes it much more difficult. Examining data from former crimes can also be very challenging and in some cases invalid as the accuracy of crimes recorded in the past is not adequate or up to date with todays systems.



This data was collected from the UK Government website (link in Bibliography). It shows a huge increase in the total number of crimes recorded, but there's no way of knowing whether this is due to an actual increase in the number of crimes committed, the number of crimes people were convicted of or just the number that was recorded.

Crime Categories

All crimes fit into a six different categories:

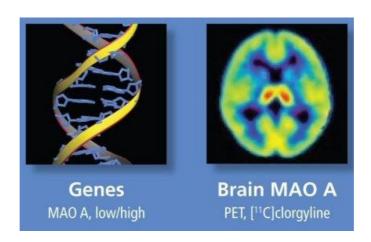
- Violent crimes: all crimes against people, such as murder or sexual assault.
- Property crimes: all crimes involving private property, such as theft, arson and vandalism.
- <u>Public Order crimes:</u> all crimes which involve acts that interfere with the operations of society and the ability of people to function efficiently, such as prostitution and crimes related to drugs & alcohol.
- White Collar crimes: all financially motivated, nonviolent crimes committed by businesses and government professionals, such as fraud, bribery and identity theft.
- Organised crimes: all crimes that are planned and controlled by powerful groups and carried out on a large scale, such as terrorism and gangs (the mafia).
- •<u>High Tech crimes:</u> all crimes that are conducted using new electronic and digitally based technology like the internet or the help of a computer, such as blackmail and hacking.

Are Criminals born or made?

When the topic of the mental cause of crime is discussed, more often than not, the question of whether criminals are born or made is brought up. Researchers have constantly been investigating the brain and DNA for a commonalities between criminals to see if there are any patterns that can be identified to prevent future crimes. It is a question of whether people who break the law were always going to, because they were born that way, or if it is triggered by events in their life, or even if all of us would be capable of breaking the law under certain circumstances. There have been many theories on this in the past that have developed with new technologies into statements that can actually be proven true or false.

Theories:

- Theory of Cesare Lombroso (1871) believed criminals could be identified by physical
 characteristics such as; unusual head shape/size, 'strange'/bloodshot eyes, ears too big/too small,
 long arms, abnormal teeth or chin too long/too small. Thus saying criminal tendencies could be
 inherited by genes that change the way people look. However, the results of his research were
 often biased to support his theory.
- Émile Durkheim Anomie Concept (1893) an Anomie is the lack of the usual social or ethical standards in an individual or group. This can lead to people feeling disconnected, as in they lack purpose or are no longer valued by society which encourages deviance and crime.
- MAO-A Gene when someone has a rare MAO-A mutation it causes a deficiency/low activity of the gene, this has been linked to increased aggression and violence with low provocation. It makes it harder for people to control impulses, especially if they have experienced a lot of traumatic childhood events.
- Social Learning Theory this theory suggests people learn from the people around them, they are criminal by association. It comes from the imitation of others actions, criminals making others believe that crime is favourable and teaching them to commit crimes.



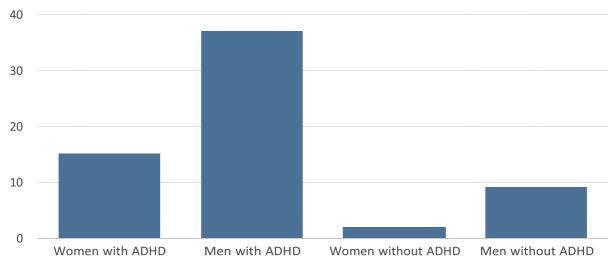
Criminals are Born

For this section I will be researching how mental health/genes impacts peoples tendencies to break the law and the types of crime this can lead to.

Many factors contribute to the likelihood of someone developing a mental illness including that of their parents having had the same issues. A study reported on by Sky News of over 50,000 people's genetic sequences, it concluded that these five mental disorders have genetic links; autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, clinical depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Therefore it can be concluded that some people are born with higher chances of developing these disorders and thus higher chances of them breaking the law.

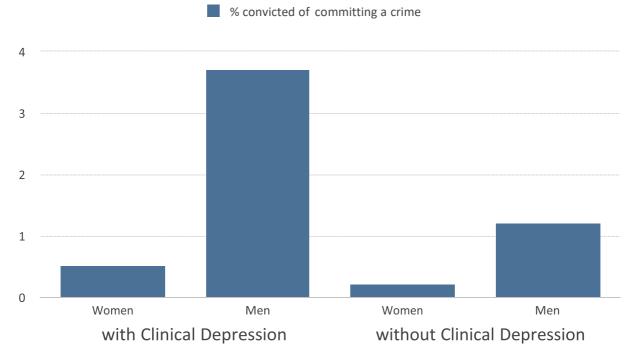
Autism by definition is a developmental disorder characterised by difficulties with social interaction and communication, and by restricted and repetitive behaviour, such as Aspergers. Depending on the severity of the disorder, and the amount of support a person with the disorder has and many other factors can all change the likelihood of them committing a crime. Misunderstanding social situations and vulnerability leaving these people open to manipulation is often the main factor if a crime has been committed by an affected person. An example of a crime committed by someone with Aspergers was in 2012 when Adam Lanza shot dead twenty young children and six of their adult carers/teachers at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, USA. This is not to suggest everyone with this disorder will commit a crime, although a symptoms include the increased ability to focus on details, which is what enabled Lanza to plan his attack so meticulously. It has also been suggested that there was no one giving him support to deal with how he was feeling, so things escalated due to a lack of support.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a medical condition. A person with ADHD has differences in brain development and brain activity that affect attention, the ability to sit still, and selfcontrol. Consequently, this can lead to a person committing crime if this disorder is not properly managed as it makes it difficult for these people to function in different environments. Counselling and certain medications can easily support and enable them to lead an improved life, but of course, not everyone has access to these. A study undertaken by psychiatrists concluded that people with ADHD were more likely to commit a crime;



A study produced by the New England Journal of Medicine saw that when on medication , people with ADHD were 32-41% less likely to commit a crime than those who have not been on it for six months or more. This suggests that when properly treated, a significant difference is made to the amount of crimes committed.

Clinical depression is a more severe form of depression, also known as major depression. Symptoms include; a loss of interest or pleasure in activities, weight loss/gain, insomnia, feeling restless & agitated/sluggish and slowed down mentally/physically, feeling worthless/guilty, issues with concentration/making decisions and thoughts of suicide. A person will be diagnosed with this if they have five or more of these symptoms on the majority of days. All of these things could be potential triggers for committing a crime as people may be more impulsive or less affected by the consequences of their actions.

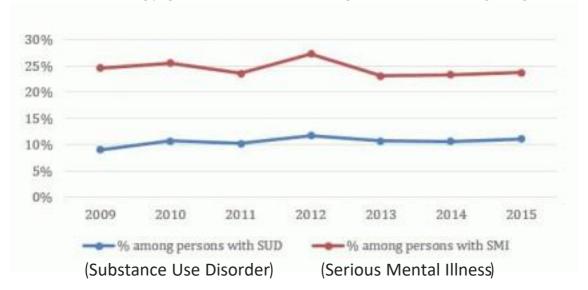


This shows that although the figures for those with clinical depression are above average, they are still small. An investigation into Swedish crime and medical records did show that there was a connection between clinical depression and an increased risk of a person committing a crime.

Bipolar Disorder affects a persons moods, they can flutter from one extreme to another. The symptoms for the episodes of depression & mania are virtually opposites so it has to be diagnosed by

a specialist assessment from a psychiatrist. Previously the disorder has been connected to aggressive, criminal behaviours such as robbery and assault. Again this risk is increased due to a lack of support and treatment as the majority of crimes (70%) committed by people with the disorder happened in the first 12 months of diagnosis. Furthermore, people with mental health issues are more likely to begin taking illegal drugs, and people who abuse substances are also more likely to develop a mental illness.

The chart on the following page shows results from the UK government website regarding this link.



Schizophrenia is a mental illness characterised by reoccurring events of psychosis. The most prominent symptoms include hallucinations (mainly hearing voices), delusions (having uncommon beliefs, not shared by others), and disordered thinking. It is these traits that lead to a crime as people are often confused and see things different to the ways we see them. Commonly found in studies is the fact that someone diagnosed with schizophrenia is 2-10 times more likely to commit a violent crime.

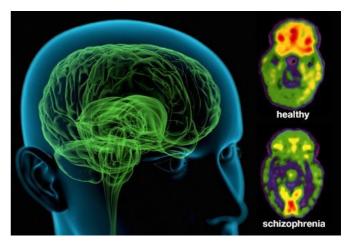


Photo obtained from whitechance.com

MAO-A Gene is the gene responsible for providing instructions to

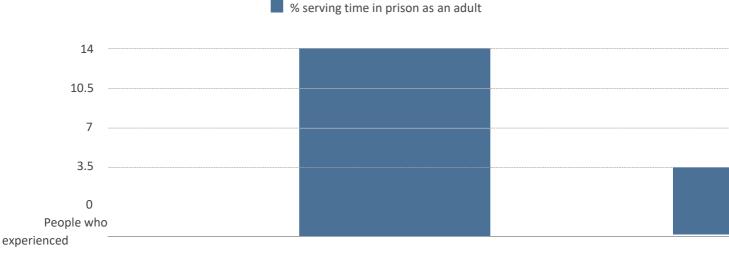
create an enzyme called Monoamine Oxidase A which is part of a group of enzymes called monoamines that break down molecules through oxidation (the loss of electrons during a reaction by a molecule, atom or ion). It is involved in the break down of hormones that control moods, emotions, sleep, appetite and response to stress. As explained in the theories section; a mutation in this gene affects how it works which explains its link to violence and aggression as it impacts how people react to stress and troublesome situations. It is even referred to as the 'Serial Killer Gene'. People with the gene were found to be 13 times more likely to have a history of repeated violent behaviour. Although, plenty of people with this gene are not violent at all, the reason for this is that events in a persons life can trigger the violent effects of this gene such as childhood trauma, although many people who do not experience this have no issues later in life.

Criminals are Made

This part of my project will be exploring how childhood trauma, alcohol & drug abuse impacts peoples tendencies to break the law and the types of crime this can lead to.

There are many types of childhood trauma ranging from abuse to neglect that can all affect different people in different ways. Some examples are; **bullying**, **intimate partner** (**domestic**) **violence**, **physical abuse and sexual abuse**. There are also lots of different types of drugs such as; **alcohol**, **heroin**, **marijuana**, **cocaine** and **ecstasy**, and lots of things that cause people to start taking them. Therefore, some criminals are not born, they become criminals because of events that have happened in their life.

Bullying is when someone seeks to harm, intimidate, or coerce someone perceived as vulnerable. Studies have found that 20-30% of all school children are perpetrators/victims of bullying at some point. This could lead to a crime later in life as someone who is bullied may wish to seek revenge on the person/s responsible for causing them that trauma or even think that what they're doing is okay, because someone did it to them, and they don't know it's wrong because no one ever stopped it happening to them. A study taken out in Finland found that victims and perpetrators were responsible for 1/3 of all juvenile crimes during the 4 year period the study was taken out.



bullying as a childPeople who did not experience bullying as a child

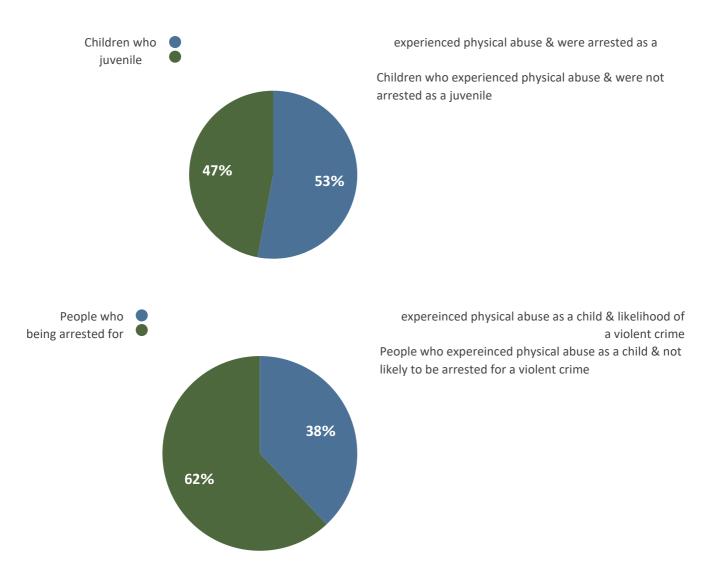
This data shows that people who experienced bullying as a child were more than twice as likely to end up in prison as an adult than people who didn't experience bullying.

Intimate Partner (Domestic) Violence is when an individual purposely causes harm or threatens to harm to any past or current partner or spouse, it may be physical, sexual, financial, verbal, or emotional in nature against the partner. It ranges from stalking, terrorising, blaming, hurting, humiliating, manipulating, and intentionally isolating a partner from social supports and family. Of course, such actions can mentally scar young children who witness it and as this is such an important

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stage for development, these children may copy this abuse later in life, it is almost learnt by them. However, if a child is given the correct mental support and taken out of an unsafe home they are less likely to be affected by this, but some go on to experience worse things when placed in the care system, it really does depend on the circumstances of each individual child. Witnessing such behaviour has also been found to increase the chances of a child developing behavioural problems which has its own influences on the likelihoods of committing crimes.

Physical Abuse occurs when a parent or caregiver commits an act that results in physical injury to a child or adolescent. Much like a child who witnesses Domestic violence, a child who experiences physical abuse may learn this behaviour and take it into their own future relationships. This then causes them issues when trying to develop and maintain any type of relationship, bringing further problems when a child feels isolated. Also, it has a huge detrimental effect on that child's ability to trust, as it is someone who the child had relied of for protection and safety that has caused them harm, almost teaching them to not trust anyone. Many children who experience this abuse then go on to become aggressive themselves, developing various behavioural problems. Combining this with a lack of faith in authority figures doesn't bode well for the likelihood of these children going on to commit crime/s later in life.



This data shows it is more likely than not for these children to be arrested as juveniles and although the likelihood of being arrested for a violent crime is 15% lower, 38% is still quite a high percentage. These numbers can be reduced if a child is offered the correct help and support such as therapy.

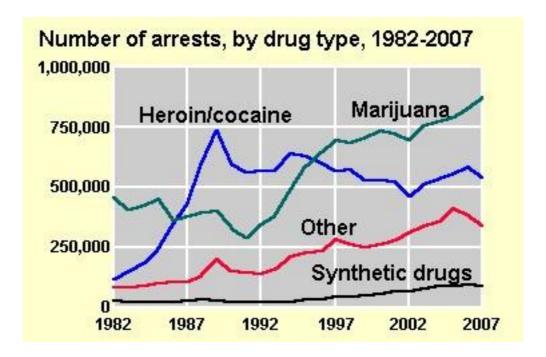
Sexual Abuse is any interaction between a child and an adult (or another child) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer. As with many other forms of childhood trauma, this type can also result in poor mental health and angry outbursts which can be reduced with the correct support & understanding. As with any childhood abuse, those who experiences sexual abuse are 26% more likely to commit a crime compared to 16% likelihood of people who received no maltreatment as a child.

Alcohol abuse is the habitual excessive use of alcohol. Alcohol itself is a flammable liquid that comes in many forms & many different strengths ranging from beer (usually around 4-6% alcohol by volume) to vodka (typically around 40% alcohol by volume). Consuming alcohol has many effects, some short-term ones include a lack of coordination, dulled perception (especially vision), vomiting, passing out, loss of critical judgement, reduced core body temperature, mood swings, raised blood pressure, trouble concentrating and lowered inhibitions leading to poor social judgement. A few longterm impacts can also be an issue; loss of attention span, memory loss, liver fibrosis, alcoholic hepatitis, trouble learning, stokes, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure and various types of cancer (throat, mouth, larynx, breast, liver, colorectal, oesophageal). Due to these effects, someone who consumes a vast amount of alcohol is more likely to commit a crime as it lowers peoples inhibitions, impairs their judgement and increases their risk of aggressive behaviour. As shown in the data below, there are also certain times of the day where more alcohol related crimes are committed. However, everyones bodies react differently to the consumption of alcohol so as it increases violent behaviour in some, others may not be effected this way. The amount of alcohol consumed may also play a part in this.



Heroin is an opioid drug made from morphine. The effects of this drug vary due to initial health conditions, gender, age and the drug intake. Common effects include; a euphoric rush (lasting 3-5 hours), a trance-like state (lasting 4-6 hours), warm/flushed skin, heavy sensation in limbs, severe itchiness, nausea/vomiting, appetite loss, runny nose, watery eyes, unnatural relaxation, slow breathing, slow heart rate, drowsiness, small pupils and muddled thinking. More severe impacts of heroin use include; liver disease, pulmonary infections, arthritis, chronic constipation, depression, kidney disease, heart valve/lining infection, skin abscesses/infections, increased risk of contracting hepatitis and a higher risk of exposure to HIV and other blood-borne viruses. As heroin itself is an illegal drug, the possession, manufacture, distribution and use of it is a crime in itself. Many people who become addicted to certain drugs may even commit crimes in order to fund their habits, as they typically struggle to hold down jobs so resort to stealing to make their money.

The below data (from the USA) shows that between 1987 and 1992 the highest number of arrests by drug type were that of heroin and cocaine although this is later overtaken by marijuana in 2002.



Data & image obtained from Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Marijuana is a psychoactive drug from the Cannabis plant used for medical or recreational purposes. This drug also has many short-term and long-term effects; in the short term marijuana causes memory problems, severe anxiety/paranoia, extremely strange behaviour due to psychosis, mild hallucinations, slower reaction times, increased heart rate, increased risk of a heart attack, increased risk of a stroke, issues with co-ordination, sexual problems. In the long term it can cause a decline in IQ, poor school performance, impaired thinking & ability to learn/perform complex tasks, decreased life satisfaction, addiction, antisocial behaviour, relationship problems and greater chances of being unemployed. In certain parts of the world, the use of marijuana is not actually illegal, but in the places where it is, the possession, manufacture, distribution and use of it is a crime, aside from this, the psychosis and antisocial behaviour could be factors in people's behaviour which will then cause them to commit a crime that they wouldn't have done had they not taken the drug.

Cocaine is a highly addictive and illegal stimulant that is made from the leaves of the coca plant. This drug causes a short term intense high, that is quickly followed by the opposite; extreme depression and edginess, leaving the person craving more of the drug. Like many other drugs, cocaine increases a users heart rate, can make them feel angry/paranoid/hostile/anxious, even when they aren't taking the drug. Bizarre/erratic/ violent behaviour, panic and psychosis, irritability, increased frequency of risky behaviour and tolerance and addiction can build up even after just one use. Cocaine is also an illegal drug, so the possession, manufacture, distribution and use of it are very illegal, despite this, cocaine is still the second most illegally trafficked drug in the world. Due to this, people using this drug have committed a crime before the drugs have even taken effect, although the increase in erratic/violent behaviour is more than likely to lead to a crime of assault or worse being committed.

MDMA(ecstasy) methylenedioxymethamphetamine is a derivative of amphetamine and a member of the phenethylamine family of chemicals. Short term effects of using MDMA include impaired judgement, confusion, severe anxiety, paranoia, involuntary teeth clenching and blurred vision. Long term effects of using MDMA include long lasting brain damage affecting thought and memory, it can even be "as if the brains switchboard was torn apart, then rewired backwards" (drugfreeworld.org), psychosis, convulsions and death. Ecstasy is also an illegal drug so the possession, manufacture, distribution and use of it are all crimes. Impaired judgement, confusion and psychosis can all lead to a wrong decision that could result in the person taking the drug breaking the law behind just using it.

Some of the most common crimes committed by MDMA users include fighting and driving under the influence of the drug.

Factors Affecting Crime in Less Developed Countries

In this area of my project, I will be looking into factors that affect crime in less developed countries. The idea behind this was that in developed countries we have the resources to give help to those who have experienced childhood trauma or have abused certain substances that have led them to committing a crime. For this topic I have narrowed down some aspects which I will be exploring in this section, these include; **childhood trauma from natural disasters & refugee trauma, poverty, corruption and different laws.** Due to these aspects that are uncommon in developed places I thought it would make an interesting comparison to the other areas of my research, as some criminals may not be born or made; they may simply have no other choice.

Childhood trauma; Disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis, can all have a huge impact on peoples lives depending on the scale of the event, especially if they occur in less developed countries as these places are less equipped to deal with the impacts than more developed countries. As terrifying as these events can be whilst they are occurring, a lack of resources following the event can further the traumatic experience that can stay with a child for life, especially if they are reoccurring events so the child has to relive the trauma over an dover again. Depression associated with post traumatic stress, behavioural changes and even physical difficulties can all lead to a child becoming increasingly frustrated and they may go on to take this frustration out on other people if they aren't given the correct support. Disasters aren't necessarily more likely to happen in more developed countries, but the impacts are definitely reduced due to them having the technologies available to detect when a disaster will happen and warn people, they often have better infrastructure so buildings are not as easily damaged by events, this also means people can evacuate easier than in countries with poorer infrastructure.

Childhood trauma; Refugee Trauma can have increased impacts on children who have experienced war or persecution as it often occurs as children are still developing and therefore impact on their future behaviours. This particular type of trauma is associated with anger and aggression as they may come to feel responsible for what's happened to them and experience intense fears over separating from their families. As with all childhood trauma, if the children who experience it are given the correct support to help them with their issues, then no problems in the future should arise, although if this behaviour is allowed to continue then it may cause issues later in life relating to violent outbursts.

Poverty is not having enough material possessions or income for a person's needs. Therefore some people may need to steal possessions/money in order to survive if they do not have enough. This suggests places with higher poverty rates may also have higher crime rates. There are also many different types of poverty that can all be linked to different types of crime. A new study in London has shown that 75% of the boroughs with the highest levels of violent crimes are also in the top 10 most deprived which shows a clear link in this area.

Economically Strong	Highest Crime Rate	Safest Country	
Nigeria	South Africa	Mauritius	
South Africa	Namibia	Botswana	
Egypt	Nigeria	Angola	
Algeria	Somaliya	Zambia	
Angola	Libya	Morocco	
Morocco	Tanzania	Lesotho	
Ethiopia	Kenya	Madagascar	
Kenya	Uganda	Sierra Loene	
Sudan	Ghana	Tunisia	
Tanzania	Zimbabwe	Egypt	

Data &. Image obtained from Quora.

This table shows that Nigeria is the most economically strong but also has the third highest crime rate which could be a result of wealth inequality, so although there may be a lot of money in the area it is not necessarily evenly distributed.

Corruption dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery. Corruption in itself often consists of crimes being committed although it is very difficult to convict those who are in power when they control the courts of law. Poorer and less developed countries often have the most corrupt governments as people in power have the most money and often keep their power as they are very wealthy. From 2018 data, Somalia was thought to be the most corrupt country and experiences high levels of corruption and bribery, this may also mean that some crime statistics are not accurate. Venezuela has the highest crime rates in the world, it is also considered unsafe for people to travel to this country as it has been issued a level 4 travel advisory, corruption in this country has also worsened since the discovery of oil placing it in the worlds top 5 corrupted countries.

Different Laws different countries have different laws such as Singapore where it is illegal to chew gum, and more significantly it is illegal to be transgender in many muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia. Therefore some countries consider things to be illegal whereas other countries do not, so someone could commit what is considered to be a crime in one country, but because the laws are different they have not actually committed a crime.

Conclusions

My opinion now is that people commit crimes due to a number of reasons and that anyone commit a crime, some people are led into it by their life experiences, but others commit crimes due to various causes not relating to that. All the data I have analysed about crime rates has suggested patterns but there are no set combinations of circumstances that lead people into breaking the law. People who have experienced different types childhood trauma are only more likely to commit a crime if they are not given enough support following the event and later in life, but there are also people who have not experienced any trauma who still commit a crime/crimes so there are anomalies that do not fit into any of the categorised triggers.

It is my belief that we cannot predict who will commit a crime as everyone has different circumstances and life experiences, however certain factors can be used as possible explanations as to why a crime was committed. There is also believed to be a 'Cycle of Violence' where people who have experienced violence or witnessed violent behaviour as a child then learn this behaviour and go onto repeating it later in life if they are not given the correct support to learn that it is wrong.

Evaluation

Taking out this project I learnt that it is never just one thing that leads a person to breaking the law it is often a combination of factors and everyone reacts differently to different drugs and traumatic experiences, so we cannot predict who will commit a crime as there is no set group of people who are guaranteed to break the law. However, we can ensure there is support available for everyone who needs it so they are all given the best chances in life when it comes to not breaking the law.

I feel my project went well because all of the sections I completed enabled me to research every aspect of 'Why people commit crimes' and I now have a much more in depth knowledge of this subject.

I think my project could have been improved had the data for specific crime rates been more accessible as a lot of it was hard to find and calculate which made it difficult to prove some of the statements made in my project.

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Commit Perpetrate or carry out (a mistake, crime or immoral act). Crime an action or omission which constitutes an offence and is punishable by law. Forensic Pathologist A forensic pathologist is a medical doctor who has completed training in anatomical pathology and has subsequently specialised in forensic pathology. Forensic pathology is pathology that focuses on determining the cause of death by examining a corpse.

Youth Offender Councillor	Youth correctional counsellors provide counselling services to juvenile offenders and their families and may act as a liaison between their clients and the courts, schools, and prisons.
Victim Advocate	Victim advocates are professionals trained to support victims of crime. Advocates offer victims information, emotional support, and help finding resources and filling out paperwork. Sometimes, advocates go to court with victims. Advocates may also contact organizations, such as criminal justice or social service agencies, to get help or information for victims.

Mental Disorders A mental disorder, also called a mental illness or psychiatric disorder, is a behavioural or mental pattern that causes significant distress or impairment of personal functioning. ... Mental disorders are usually defined by a combination of how a person behaves, feels, perceives, or thinks. Law Abiding Being obedient to the laws of society. Corporal Punishment Physical punishment such as whipping. Death Penalty Punishment by execution.