

Sociology Transition Work

Week 4



Key questions in sociology: is modern British society fair?

- Is the education system fair?
- Is the family fair?
- Is the criminal justice system fair?

Is the Criminal Justice System Fair?

The criminal justice system refers to all parts of the system that creates and enforces the laws. This includes the government, who create and pass laws, police officers, who enforce the laws, judges, who decide sentences for those convicted of crimes and prison and probation officers.

Here are some statistics on the criminal justice system:

- Black people are 9 times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police
- The police are 3 x more likely to use force against black people
- Young, black males are overrepresented in prison

There are many explanations for these statistics, summarised below:

1. Institutional racism: this means racism embedded in the criminal justice system. The murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 by five white youths led to the Macpherson Report of 1998 and revealed the huge extent of institutional racism in the police force – the report recommended increasing the diversity of the police force and establishing an independent police complaints service, but there are still concerns of institutional racism in the police today.
2. Family structure: Tony Sewell argues lone parent families are likely to lead to black boys being involved in crime
3. Poverty: people from some ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely to live in poverty and therefore more likely to commit crime.

The treatment of different groups, particularly different ethnicities, in the criminal justice system demonstrates one of the main inequalities which remains an issue in the UK, affecting people's life chances significantly.

This results both in it appearing that more ethnic minority groups, especially black people, commit more crime (when they may just be targeted more by the police) and ethnic minority individuals not being taken seriously as victims of crime.

In addition, feminists argue women are often not taken seriously as victims of crime like domestic violence and sexual assault. They argue the patriarchal criminal justice system are keen to blame women for making themselves into victims of these crimes by dressing/ acting a certain way.

Even though there are a specific set of laws that everyone must follow, sociologists argue that these rules and the enforcement of the law are applied differently, unequally, to different groups of people, resulting in these inequalities.

Task 1: watch the following videos/ read the articles and summarise the main points

<p>BBC Teach Clip: Institutional Racism</p>	
<p>Article: David Lammy describing why stop and search is unfair</p>	
<p>Clip: Tony Sewell explaining his perspective that lone parent families lead to black boys being involved in gangs</p>	
<p>Clip: David Lammy discussing racial bias in the Criminal Justice System</p>	

Task 2: write approx. 500 words describing whether or not the criminal justice system is fair. Explain why it is/ is not fair using evidence from the articles and videos or from further research.