Fallacies about crime

Marcus Felson
Texas State University
Eight fallacies

1. Dramatic fallacy
2. Cops and courts fallacy
3. Not-me fallacy
4. Innocent-youth fallacy
5. Ingenuity fallacy
6. Organized-crime fallacy
7. Big gang fallacy
8. Agenda fallacy
First, the Dramatic fallacy

• Extreme murders
• Kidnaping
• Serial killers
• Not simple assaults
• Most murders never get covered, except in a small town
• Murders less than one thousandth of one per cent of criminal events
Dramatic fallacy
Traffic Caseload, 23 States, 2016

- Non-Criminal traffic cases: 75%
- Ordinances
- Parking

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Drug crimes?

• Alcohol abuse much more serious
• Marijuana more than hard drugs
• Off and on more than frequent usage
• Exceptions, of course
• The extreme behaviors put more BURDEN on social system and justice system
Second, the Cops and courts fallacy

- Most substance abuse crimes not reported to police
- Most disorders that are reported are handled without arrest
- Most arrests not prosecution
- Most prosecutions without trials, plea bargaining
- Most trials are bench trials, without jury
- The justice system cannot really act most of the time
- Zero tolerance is a silly myth
Not the televised image

• Many criminal cases dropped

• About two-thirds of remaining felony defendants were eventually convicted

• More than 95% of these convictions occurred through a guilty plea.

• If they are tried at all, mostly bench trials, not jury trials
What police do in Port Moody, Canada, 2014

Public safety and welfare incidents

Traffic incidents

By-law enforcement

Alcohol & drugs

Miscellaneous

Property crime & other nonviolent crime

Violent crime

Low Turnover Opens Up Fewer Prison Beds

That makes the justice system less efficient
Order maintenance important (and difficult): 
Rude encounters can escalate
Crimes and problems

Personal controls

Social controls

Situational controls

Formal controls

Crime occurs

Society's Four Control Processes
More police on patrol?

- Drop in the bucket
- Too much real estate, too many homes and businesses
- 168 hours a week
- Four shifts
- Paperwork etc
- Too costly
- A few seconds going by
- Don’t know you anyway
Most police actions

• Usually no arrest
• 80 percent or more polite in both directions
• That other 15 or 20 percent still bad, but seldom violent
• Most police never fire their gun or even take it out
• Never fired at
• The problem is rudeness in both directions, perhaps 10 or 20 percent of the time
3. The not-me fallacy

- Fundamental attribution error
  - My misdeeds are situational
  - Strangers’ misdeeds are bad personality and immorality
- Middle class drug and alcohol abuse
- Rural drug and alcohol abuse
- Austin Porterfield 1943  Texas Christian University
4. Innocent youth fallacy

- Aggression at early ages, before 10
- Delinquency starting in middle school ages, esp. 11-14
- Usually not corrupted by adults, or even older youths
- Own age
Unequal Growth of Two Regions of the Brain During Adolescence

Teenage sexual abuse of other underage youths – a serious problem

Age Distribution of Juvenile Sex Offenders

% of all sex offenders

OFFENDER'S AGE

Victims 12 or older

Victims under 12

N = 13,471  NIBRS Data
Volatility of teenagers

**Figure 4G**
Two-Week Shifts in Socializing and Drinking by Ninth-Grade Kentucky Youths

5. Ingenuity fallacy

- It must have been a professional
- Most crime is simple
- Most crime is fast
- Most crime is easy
- Most crime involves little planning or none
- Most co-offending is simple, too
Do Burglars Plan their Burglaries?

Result from 422 incarcerated burglars from North Carolina, Kentucky, and Ohio, approximately 2010

Males

- Planned
- Spur of the moment
- It varies

Females

- Planned
- Spur of the moment
- It varies

Calculations provided by the authors of Sanders, A. N., Kuhns, J. B., Blevins, K. R. Exploring and understanding differences between deliberate and impulsive male and female burglars. Crime and Delinquency, in press.
Organization?

- Organized crime exaggerated
- Some exceptions, but as a rule less fancy
- Exceptions where the state is weak
- Exceptions when drug business is huge
6. Big gang fallacy

• The “gang” word is a problem
• Same general name does not mean they know each other
• Most gangs are local, often very local
• Confusion of gangs and organized crime
• Secret vs. overt gangs
• Street gangs vs. prison gangs
• A normal thief does not want to divide up the loot with too many others
Scales can fool you

Serious violence ages 13 through 24 by neighborhood income

Adapted from Fabio, Tu, Loeber & Cohen (2011). Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Now look at the whole scale.

The full scale changes your impression.

Percent of local boys involved in serious violence.

In all three types of neighborhood, most boys not involved in serious violence.

- Public housing
- Other low income
- Average areas

Early teens, Mid teens, Late teens, Early 20s
Figure 4L
Risk of Violent Victimization per Billion Person-Hours Spent in Different Activities, Ages 15–19
Figure 4m
Crimes Teenagers Commit per 10,000 Hours Spent in Different Activities, Peterborough, U.K.
8. The agenda fallacy

- Moral agendas
- Religious agendas
- Social and political agendas
- Welfare state agendas

End of this slideshow