

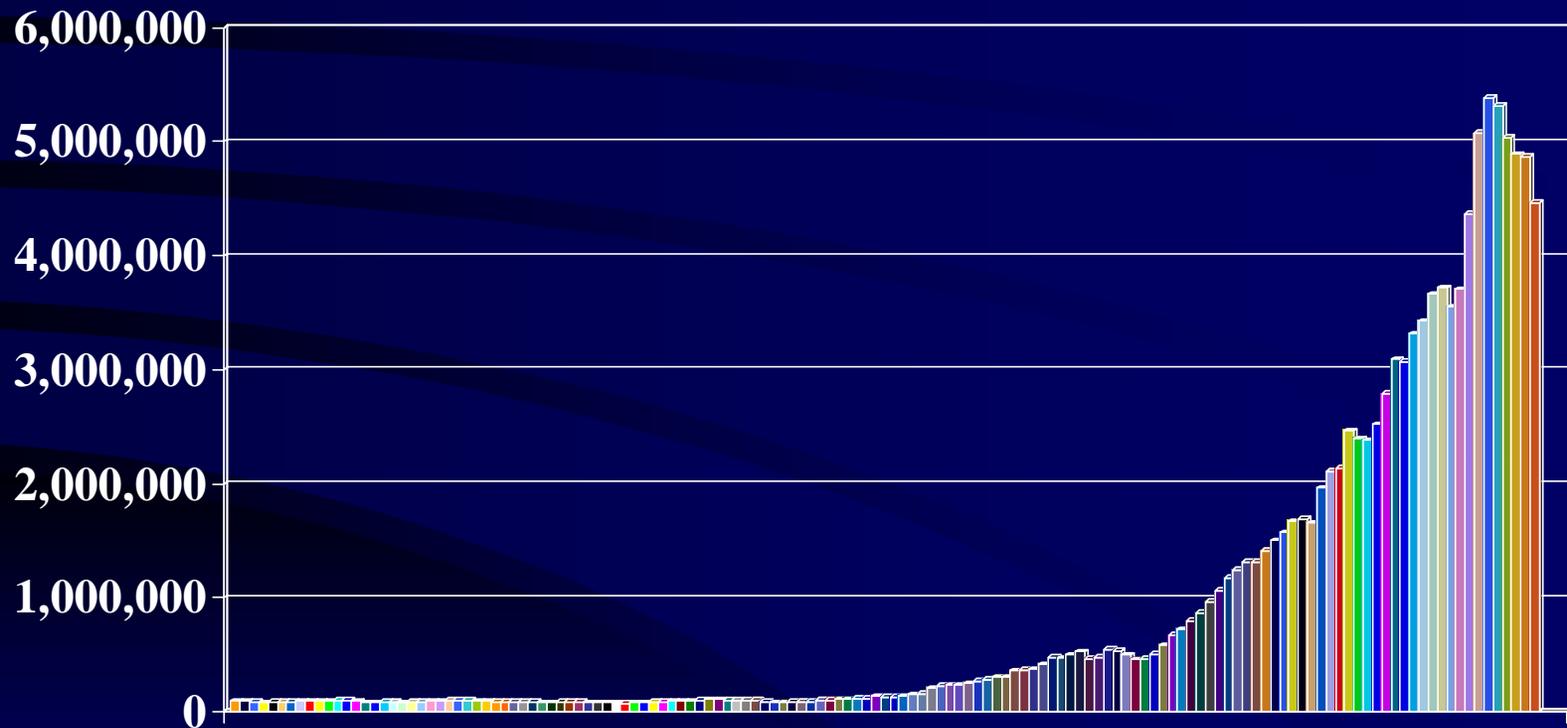
Inequality and crime

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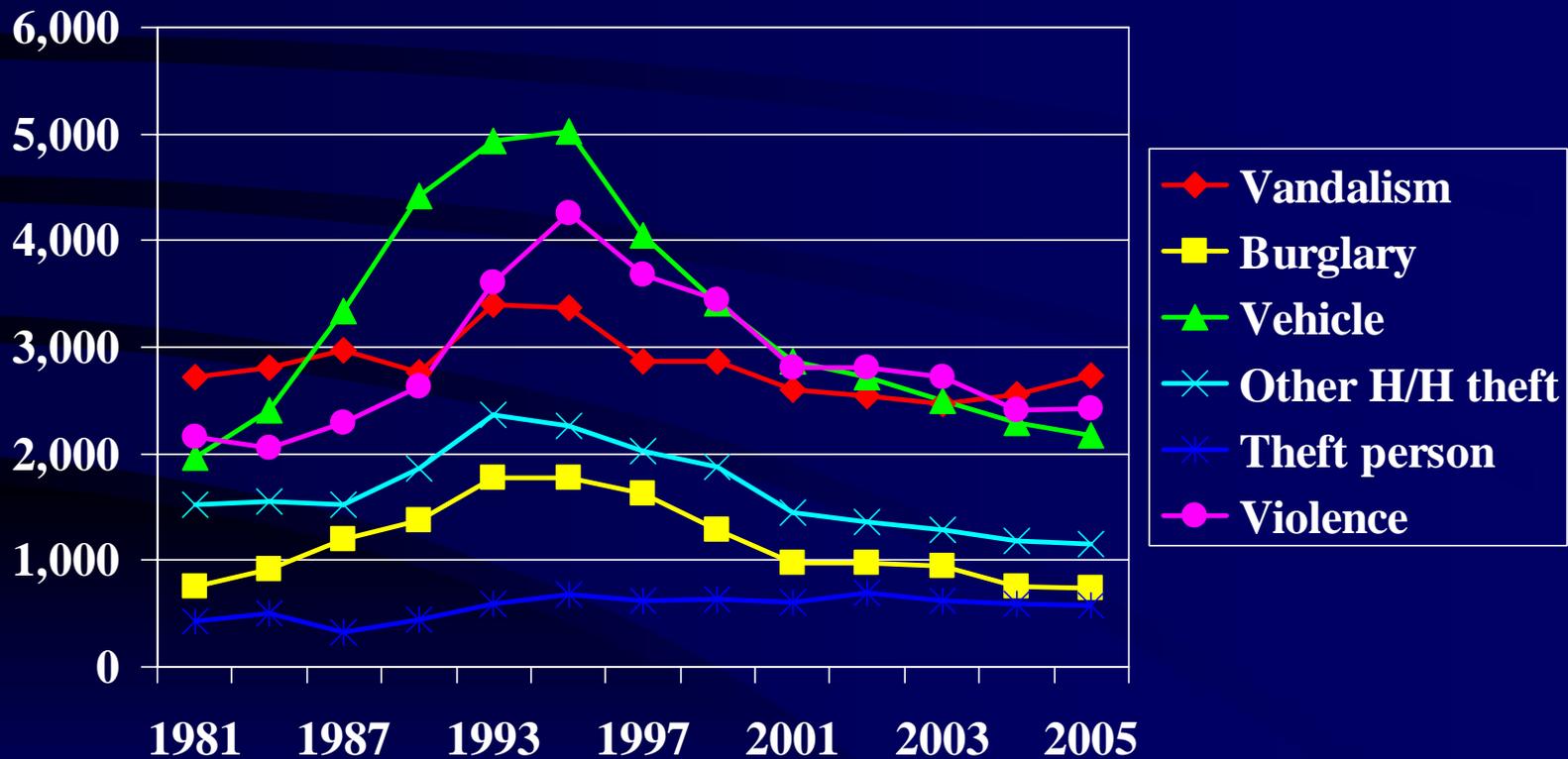
IER seminar

University of Warwick, 7 December 2006

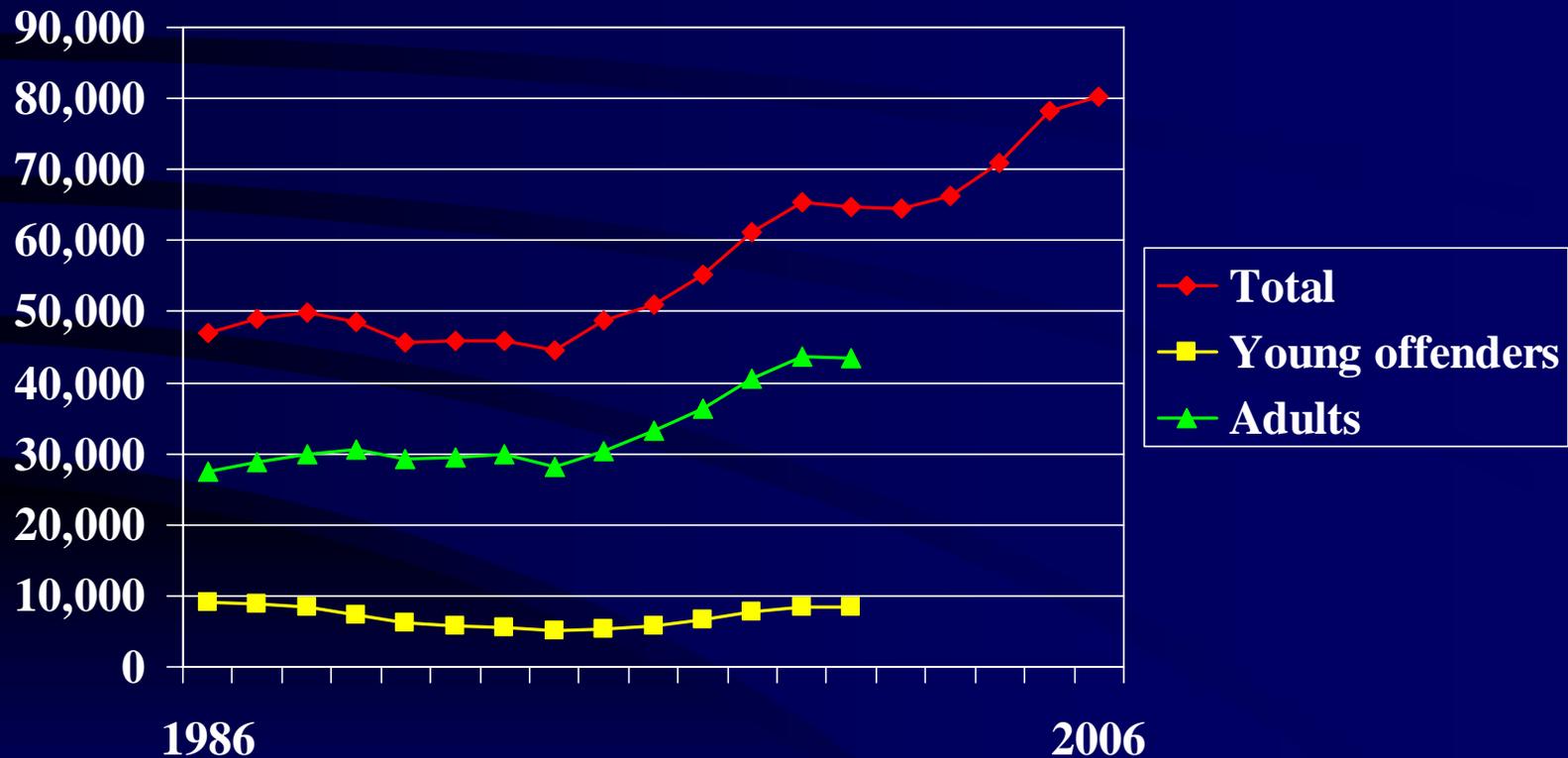
Recorded crime England & Wales, 1857-1997



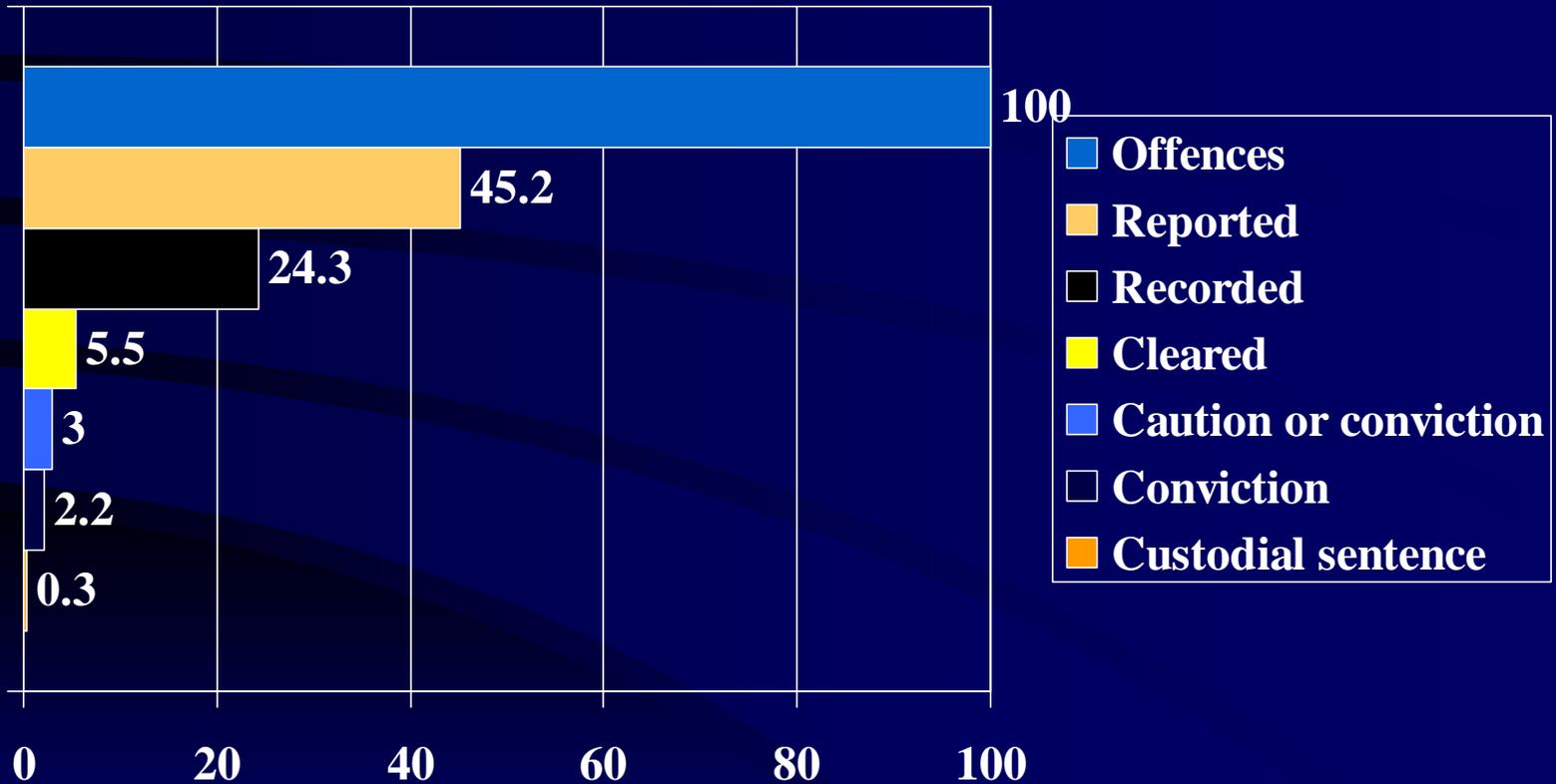
BCS crime 1981-2005



Prison population England & Wales



Attrition (1997)



Two questions

1. Does inequality cause crime?
2. Does the criminal justice system cause inequality?

I will mainly cover the first issue today

Theories linking inequality and offending

1. Marxist: the powerful define and use the law to maintain their position
2. Anomie, strain, relative deprivation
3. Breakdown of social structures in deprived neighbourhoods ('social disorganization')

Theories linking inequality and crime contd.

4. Rational choice (theft is the best option for the very poor)
5. Social bonds (weakened under economic stress)
6. Deprivation makes parenting harder
7. Opportunity and routine activity

Methods of research and analysis

1. Individual level (social class/income of offenders)
2. International comparisons
3. Intranational comparisons between cities
4. Time trends

Individual level

- Self-reported offending only mildly related to social class
- Serious and persistent offending more strongly related to social class
- Relationship is strongest for convicted, and especially imprisoned, offenders
- Offending related to childhood deprivation

International comparisons

1. Impossible for crime in general because criminal justice systems vary so widely
2. But possible for penal systems and for homicide

Four political economies (Cavadino and Dignan (2006))

1. Neo-liberalism (US, perhaps UK)
2. Conservative corporatism (Germany, France, Netherlands, Italy)
3. Social democratic corporatism (Sweden)
4. Oriental corporatism (Japan)

Arranged by rate of imprisonment from most to least punitive. Homicide rates also correspond.

Intranational comparisons between cities

- US studies consistently show income inequality is related to crime rates at the city level
- Proportion in poverty is not consistently related to crime rates

Time trends: the broad framework

1. Many and varied explanatory factors
2. Social transformations involve a complex of factors in combination
3. Nobody predicted the dramatic reversal of the upward crime trend throughout the developed world in the 1990s

Time trends: some canvassed explanations

1. Change in the family
2. Lengthening of youth transitions, change in the status and culture of youth
3. Deterrence: change in the likelihood that offending will be punished
4. Alcohol and drugs
5. Weakening of social bonds and social controls associated with modernity

Inequality and trends in crime

Field's econometric models

1. The best predictor is growth in consumption, not unemployment
2. In the short run, growth in consumption is related to a drop in property crime but in the long run to a rise in property crime
3. Growth in consumption is related to a rise in personal crime in both the short and the long run

Crime and the labour market

1. Longitudinal studies show people commit more crimes when out of work
2. Dual labour markets associated with more crime?
3. Increased female participation leads to more crime? (e.g. less female supervision of children, more opportunities for female offending)

Changes in inequality and crime

1. Rapid growth in income inequality in Britain, slowed under Labour
2. Growing polarization between work-rich and work-poor households
3. Low-paid, low-skilled jobs insecure
4. Econometric studies show these changes associated with changes in crime rates

Changes in inequality and crime contd.

5. Impact of minimum wage found to be associated with crime rates
6. Crime rose more in areas more affected by introduction of the Job-Seeker's Allowance in 1996, which cut benefits

Conclusions

1. The growth in crime since 1950 is explained by a complex web of social and economic transformations
2. Growing inequality has become an important feature of these since 1973
3. Inequality has been shown to have at least some effect on crime, controlling for other economic variables

Conclusions contd.

4. Fragmented, post-industrial labour markets are probably associated with rising crime
5. The punitive response to crime increases inequality further because
6. The poor and weak are the usual targets of criminal justice
7. The punitive response to youth offending increases the likelihood of reoffending