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Let's get real about the 'riots': Exploring the relationship between deprivation and the English summer disturbances of 2011

Carly Lightowers

Keywords Disorder, disturbances, inequality, relative deprivation, social exclusion

Abstract

Despite media and political rhetoric to the contrary, there is persuasive evidence to suggest an association between deprivation and those involved in the English riots of 2011, which continues to be downplayed when developing responses to crime and crime prevention policy. This study explores empirical evidence from two major cities in the North West of England, which highlight an association between deprivation and rioting in both criminal charge and sentencing data allowing further exploration of some of these issues. The paper argues that to mask the rioting as 'mindless criminality' is to ignore wider social-structural inequalities and to silence important messages contained in the rioting behaviour from disenfranchised youth and communities about the inequalities they suffer.

Introduction

In the summer of 2011, what initially started as a peaceful protest due to grievances about the suspicious nature of the police shooting of Mark Duggan, and lack of communication with his family and the community about his death, soon erupted into rioting which subsequently spread across a number of cities in England. The initial riots occurred in Tottenham, London – an area known for its heightened community tensions and longstanding history of questioning police legitimacy, as seen in the riots of 1985 particularly between the police and minority ethnic groups.¹ Whilst Mark Duggan's shooting served as the trigger for more recent events, some, if not all, of the 2011 rioting – especially outside of London – soon became a display of resentment against a government and criminal justice system that had systematically marginalised and discriminated against large sections of society – notably less affluent and economically deprived communities. The media and politicians portrayed the riots as a 'shock' and an apolitical mindless display of violence and responded to it as such with harsh punitive measures.

The aim of this paper is to explore the role of relative deprivation, to illustrate what has been downplayed in political responses to the riots. The study favours a left-realist framework which is tested by examining quantitative evidence from two large cities in the North West of England for an association between being charged or sentenced in relation to the riots and living in a deprived area.

Whilst the direction of causality cannot be established in the current study, an association, if confirmed, would suggest deprivation is an important underlying contextual factor when considering involvement in the riots. In turn, suggesting that in order to realistically address the problem of rioting and prevent further similar unrest from reoccurring we need to think seriously about addressing

¹ Sparked by deaths during police searches (Cynthia Jarrett and Dorothy Groce) (Davis 1989; BBC 2011b; The Telegraph 2012) in the aftermath of the Brixton riots (1981) which had been triggered by perception of the police trying to question a young black male who had been stabbed in a fight by stopping the minicab he was in bound for hospital, against a backdrop of on-going racial and class tensions and on-going stop and search operations (Home Office 1981; Unsworth 1982).

social inequalities and deprivation in order ameliorate its corrosive effects and work towards an effective solution centred around promoting social justice and inclusion.

Existing debates surrounding the riots – individualism vs. social structure

Many aetiological explanations, offered in public and political discourses, framed the riots as being a problem to be explained by individual decision-making, lack of impulse control and moral irresponsibility, reminiscent of classicist explanations of crime and control theories based on the concepts of self-control and rational choice (cf. Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Moffitt, 1993). These interpretations suggest a need to modify individual behaviour, as seen in David Cameron's proposals to 'improve parenting' and tackle the 'moral collapse' of society (BBC, 2011a), as in a criminological right realist tradition. For example, Justice Secretary Kenneth Clarke claimed that the actions were those of a 'feral underclass' lacking morals (Lewis et al., 2011), dehumanising an entire section of society by virtue of their supposed wayward moral constitution. Whilst commentary from the Mail Online suggested these were the actions of an entire generation of uneducated welfare dependent youngsters with no 'moral compass' (Hastings, 2011), again effectively 'othering' a segment of the population and suggesting a hiatus between the conventional and the deviant citizen (cf. Young, 2007).

Whilst offering 'secure narrative' (Young, 2007), the above outlined explanations deny the very real contextual, socio-economic and structural factors that frame the disturbances of summer 2011 and circumvent any discussion of the responsibility of those in power to listen to the messages contained in the rioting behaviour. The disorder was quickly dubbed 'riots' by the media and politicians alike; in itself a 'loose term of moral judgement' (Sumner 2011) "reflecting no real sense of what the violence and disorder represented" (Briggs, 2012b:389).

Attempts to locate blame ineffective parenting (see for example BBC, 2011a) or to describe the behaviour in question as 'mindless violence' (Majumdar, 2011; Taylor, et al. 2011) once more centre on notions of self-control and discipline: denying those involved agency in their decisions to partake in the disorder,

silencing their concerns and thus bestowing upon them increased punitive controls and harsh sentences (see Gallagher, 2011; Briggs 2012a). Whilst indicative correlates such as poor parenting are associated with offending and delinquent behaviour (Hirschi, 1969; Sampson and Laub, 1994), such 'risk factors' are likely to be 'symptoms' of wider confounded problems, such as social-structural inequality and denote the varying resources available to parents in wealthy and deprived areas. It is also noteworthy that the riots occurred in the first summer of the coalition government in the UK – a government characterised by its aggressive budget cuts in the areas of youth service provision, community resources and benefits (BBC, 2010; Cabinet Office, 2010; HM Treasury, 2010; The Independent, 2010) in turn reducing legitimate and stable income, employment opportunities and leisure pursuits.

Sidelined issues: Poverty, austerity, inequality and consumerism

Given shortcomings of the many populist individualist explanations on offer in the aftermath of the disturbances, academic commentators started to forward more considered and balanced accounts and insights into aetiology. These included explanations accounting for the 'sinister role of consumerism' (Briggs, 2012b) and the role of austerity, poverty and inequality as contextual factors – issues, like those of social mobility, racism, discrimination and aggressive policing, that the public and political discourses that evolved in the aftermath of the riots failed to sufficiently engage with.

Scholars from left realist, critical and cultural criminological traditions have offered insights into the complex and varied interaction between inequality of opportunities and individual motivations for partaking in the disorder (see, for example, Bauman, 2011; Grover, 2011; Moxon, 2011; Sumner, 2011; Treadwell et al., 2013; Žižek, 2011). Critical traditions emphasise power relations and inequalities between the rich and the poor – the powerful and the powerless. Commentators from this tradition often point to resulting tensions and social exclusion as well as invasive and punitive methods of social control being imposed on the poor by the rich. Building on this, cultural traditions incorporate individual motives and identity formation into such explanations, acknowledging

the consumerist cultural context. Whilst both provide valuable insights their relevance for current political consideration and developing immediate practical policy responses is limited by their 'idealism' and reluctance to engage with mainstream political empiricism. Despite this fact, to date limited materialist empirical analyses have been presented using a criminological left 'realist' framework.

'Getting real about the riots' – a left realist framework

A left realist framework, as employed in the current study, purports riots are best explained by relative deprivation, social inequalities and the oppressive surveillance of socio-economically marginalised (*cf.* Young, 2007). The concept of relative deprivation suggests that the strain (*cf.* Merton, 1938) experienced due to the disjuncture between desired goals and available means by which to achieve these can be monetary or materially related as well as subjectively related. Thus, "deprivation, even relative deprivation, may not itself lead to crime, if people feel they have a chance of improving things. But if they feel they are marginalised, that there is no chance of things changing, that the more fortunate groups in society do not care about their plight, then there is a high potential for deviant behaviour (Lea and Young, 1984; Stack 1984)" (Hudson, 1993:84).

Young (1999, 2007) builds on this concept suggesting that a process of 'social bulimia' occurs in late modernity whereby individuals can be simultaneously culturally *included* (for example, in the consumerist cultural ideal) and yet structurally *excluded* (by being denied the economic and social resources to participate in this ideal). 'Social bulimia' is thought to be characteristic of largely unrestrained capitalist societies that emphasise individualism (Young 1999, 2007), as individuals subscribe to the mainstream culture and its 'glittering prizes' yet are not afforded the legitimate opportunities with which to secure them (Matthews and Young 1992). In turn this can foster feelings of cultural and institutional disembeddedness, which can result in discontent and anxiety as a result of precarious inclusion (for example in the labour market) and ontological insecurity (Young 2007). Others have argued that seeking inclusion in consumerist ideology may also explain some of the 'objectless dissatisfaction'

expressed by rioters, as they were unable to locate or articulate the causes of their marginalisation and subjective anger (Treadwell et al., 2013). The concept of relative deprivation can thus serve as a useful concept on which to draw when seeking to explain some of the protests, violent and acquisitive crimes that came to characterise the summer disturbances of 2011.

Social protests are known to erupt when there is a sense of injustice (Grover, 2011); often resulting from a single incident of prejudice (for example, suspicious harassment by the police), especially where this occurs against a backdrop of ongoing denial of access to labour market, legal rights and rights to citizenship (Young 1999). Evidence of such processes can also be seen in the Brixton riots (1981) when long-standing racial tensions and a sense of inequality and injustice motivated local communities to riot (Home Office, 1981). "In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that widespread social protest has recently been witnessed in England, because whilst the cultural emphasis upon consumption as the means of denoting and measuring success continues unabated, the opportunities for successfully engaging with such cultural practices have [...] become more difficult in recent years" (Grover, 2011:3). This may also explain the widespread looting characteristic of these events and why the disorder was in some cases targeted at retail outlets (Grover, 2011).

Individual motives and grievances

Previous research (Guardian/LSE, 2011) conducted with individuals involved in the riots, has already evidenced a variety of motivational grievances shaping decisions to engage in rioting. This included: increased higher education tuition fees; cuts in education maintenance allowance (EMA); youth service closures; anger over the shooting of Mark Duggan; frustrations about their own experience in their treatment by the police (in particular the contentious use of stop and search powers lacking in procedural justice); as well as perceived wider social and economic injustice and inequalities in opportunity (Guardian/LSE, 2011). It would thus appear as though some of those involved were responding directly to the lived realities, everyday strains and financial pressures experienced on the back of policies that systematically marginalise communities

both politically and socio-economically and deprive them of the opportunity to engage meaningfully in society.

As well as 'ideological' motives, it is also noteworthy that many individuals engaged in rioting and looting opportunistically (Guardian/LSE, 2011), were swept up in the collective rule breaking or drawn to the 'carnavalesque' nature of the disturbances (cf. Presdee, 2000; Žižek, 2011). However, to suggest the actions taken by those caught up in the disturbances were simply the product of rational choice and considered calculations, ignores the 'suspension' of rules and norms described by many that were a feature of the 'riots' (Guardian/LSE, 2011). Such a position is also blind to the 'thrill' of being involved (cf. Katz, 1988) as well as socio-structural constraints on behaviour and available resources from a materialist perspective.

As showcased in the example of the Brixton & Toxteth riots, and in the more recent riots of 2011, when individuals are not able to achieve their aspirations and goals through legitimate means, as well as being systematically marginalised and discriminated against by repressive law and order approaches, they may feel they have no legitimate means through which they can voice their concerns. In such instances, riots potentially represent a last resort on which to draw to have their grievances 'heard'. Given the many comments offered on oppressive stop and search procedures, police-community tensions and wider perceived inequalities both at one of the Guardian/LSE community engagement events (1st March 2012, Toxteth) and in the final Guardian/LSE report (2011), it seems particularly pertinent to consider structural inequalities when seeking to explain the disturbances and look to solutions to repair communities and avoid repeat events.

Given that violence thrives in unequal, unjust and un-egalitarian societies, many sociological explanations of violence have focused on the resulting anxiety (or 'ontological insecurity'; cf. Young, 2007) as the mechanism behind violent behaviour (see commentary and theoretical reflections by Young, 2007). It is also thought that inequality and lack of opportunity harbour resentment, a lack of trust in communities and feelings of disrespect and humiliation, further

exacerbating such anxiety (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2006; Young, 2007). There is also evidence to suggest that more deprived areas and impoverished communities are disproportionately targeted with tautologically-justified over-policing which in turn further alienate residents and undermine confidence in the criminal justice system (Fagan & Tyler, 2008; Higgins, 2012). Inequality can thus be considered to have fostered fertile conditions from which the riots emerged. In this framework, deprivation can be considered a precursor or antecedent to the riots. It is therefore suggested that social systemic marginalisation and deprivation are likely to result in disproportionate rates of those charged and sentenced in relation to the riots – a claim that will be explored in the current study.

Data and Methods

Data

Whilst quantitative data on the offences and individuals charged and sentenced is available from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ, 2012a; 2012b), Home Office (2011) and selected analyses published from the Guardian/LSE study 'Reading the Riots' (2011), these tend to only present national summary statistics, skewed by the fact that the majority of offending occurred in London (72% of all sentences dispensed were in London; MoJ, 2012). Given significant local variation in the characteristics of the disorder across different cities, a more nuanced and detailed analysis of local contexts is important. Here two case study areas in the North of England - Greater Manchester and Merseyside (where 8% and 3% of sentences were dispensed respectively; MoJ 2012) - are explored in further detail using three charge and sentencing datasets shared with the author from court reporters and the police. The data do not necessarily represent all those charged or sentenced in relation to the riots; rather a sample of those that were captured and readily available at the time at which they were shared. However, having cross-checked the data with other sources, the demographic profile of the cases is in line with the Ministry of Justice data (2012b) and the author is broadly satisfied that the data missing is due to the difficulties in managing the overwhelming number of cases rather than excluding any particular type of case. These data offer finer detail and further insight into the distribution of offences

by area level deprivation within these two geographies, than can be gleaned from the readily available MoJ or Home Office data or published results from the Guardian/LSE Reading the Riots study.

1. Firstly, data was obtained on 197 people charged at charged at Manchester City Magistrates court up to the 23rd August 2011 in relation to the riots. These data were collated by court reporters from Greater Manchester police (GMP) press office and Manchester Magistrates court and represents the vast majority of those charged in Greater Manchester (GM) in relation to the riots in the period immediately after their occurrence. An unknown number whose cases that were not yet ready for the Magistrates Court were not recorded, but these are thought to comprise only a handful at the time at which the data were shared. (MoJ (2012a) data suggests that there were a total of 249 first hearings in court resulting from charges brought against individuals in Greater Manchester almost a year later (by the 10th August 2012)).
2. The second dataset comprises details of 110 people sentenced at Manchester Magistrates Court (n=30), Manchester Youth Court (n=9) and Manchester Crown Court (n=71) between the 11th August 2011 and the 9th January 2012 as they were processed in relation to the riots. These data were collated by court reporters from the Manchester Evening News (MEN). Whilst these data only comprise 40% of the total all those sentences issued in Greater Manchester almost a year later (according to MoJ 2012a), there is no reason to believe that they are unusual in a way in which could bias the results highlighted here.
3. Finally, the third dataset was data collated by Merseyside Police on the 355 people charged between 9th August 2011 and 26th January 2012 in relation to the riots. Once more this is thought to comprise a full list of those charged in relation to the riots during this period. (It included those arrested on suspicion for an offence where no further action was taken against them or where charges were refused as well as those that were arrested whilst on bail for offences pending further enquiries). The data were obtained from a database set up by Merseyside police specifically to

deal with operational issues in relation to the disturbances. MoJ (2012a) data suggests that there were a total of 93 first hearings in court resulting from charges brought against individuals in Merseyside almost a year later (by the 10th August 2012); perhaps suggesting that many initial charges were dropped.

Whilst composing an authoritative public record in key respects, court and arrest data have a number of limitations: those involved but not arrested or charged and subsequently sentenced may have characteristics which helped them avoid apprehension, including experience of crime and/or these records might be considered artefacts of the policing techniques and clean-up operations used to generate them: thus potential tautological over-policing and targeting of particular communities would result in these being overrepresented in the data.

Data linkage

In the datasets obtained, the number of background variables available at the individual level is, for reasons of confidentiality, very limited. Rather details of the area each individual lived in, based on the postcode of their home address are the primary subject of analysis in the current study. All three datasets were analysed by linking the postcodes to Lower Super Output Areas and the 2008 midyear population estimates and 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD²) scores of each area. In so doing, there were a number of issues worth noting affecting each of the datasets outlined below in turn.

GM charge data. 153 of the 197 cases had valid postcodes, of which all but six lay within Greater Manchester and were used in the relevant geographical and deprivation analyses. Six of those without postcodes had been recorded as No Fixed Address (NFA). This left 147 cases with a Greater Manchester postcode available for the geographic analyses presented here.

² The Index of Multiple Deprivation is a composite score of indicators thought to contribute to deprivation including income, barriers to housing and services, employment/education, health deprivation and disability, crime and living environment.

GM sentencing data. 86 postcodes of sentenced individuals were identified from the available street address, where known or applicable³ and 83 of these were successfully matched to Lower Super Output Areas: of which all but 2 lay within Greater Manchester and were used in the relevant geographical and deprivation analyses. This left 81 cases with a Greater Manchester postcode available for the geographical analyses presented here.

Merseyside arrest data. 346 of the 355 cases had valid postcodes, of which all but 8 lay within Merseyside and were used in the relevant geographical and deprivation analyses. Eight of those without postcodes were recorded as No Fixed Address (NFA). This left 338 cases with a Merseyside postcode available for the geographic analyses presented here. However, using the records given, 3 postcodes could not be matched using the available databases and so this left 335 valid cases with Merseyside postcodes.

Methods

Working within the confines of the available data, simple descriptive statistics and modest bivariate analyses will be presented here to explore levels of deprivation in the areas in which those charged and/or sentenced reside. As well as presenting key individual-level characteristics of those arrested, charged and sentenced in the two areas, each of the three linked datasets was examined as to whether or not they yielded area-level associations between deprivation (as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation – IMD) and the number of charges/sentences in an area⁴. Given that areas are the objects of study in such analysis, individual correlates were not controlled for when examining these associations⁵. Testing for associations between the number of charges/sentences

³ 4 of those sentenced were recorded as having no fixed address and a further 20 address details were not known/recorded.

⁴ This approach also effectively controls for population density (given that the geographic units under study here (Lower Super Output Areas) are standardised by population size. Further spatial controls, such as proximity to the city centre, were not controlled for as to do so would require further sophisticated spatial regression techniques.

⁵ To do so would require further sophisticated multi-level models in which individuals were nested within areas, so as not to conflate individual and area levels of analysis. Such analyses are considered beyond the scope of this paper.

and level of deprivation in areas was done using Spearman's correlation coefficient. Ranked distributions of the number of charges/sentences by IMD decile across the range of data sets were also examined. Utilising multiple sources of administrative data on both charges and sentences across two geographies goes some way towards triangulating results. Lack of standardisation by the collectors meant that results could not be broken down by standard offence categories/classifications to allow for meaningful comparisons across the three data sets. However, further detailed analysis of the processing of offenders through the courts in Greater Manchester using MoJ (2012a; 2012b) and the sentencing data obtained here is forthcoming (Lightowlers and Quirk, forthcoming).

Results

Key findings from each data set are presented in Table 1 below, which will be used as a basis from which to discuss associations the respective charge and sentencing data has with deprivation. Results from each data set are discussed in turn.

Table 1: Number charged and sentenced in each deprivation category in Greater Manchester and Merseyside

IMD decile of area of residence	Total charged in Greater Manchester n (%)	Total sentenced in Greater Manchester n (%)	Total charged in Merseyside n (%)
1 (least deprived 10%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	22 (7%)
2	4 (3%)	2 (2%)	26 (8%)
3	3 (2%)	3 (4%)	21 (6%)
4	6 (4%)	1 (1%)	35(10%)
5	9 (6%)	8 (10%)	29 (9%)
6	15 (10%)	11 (14%)	36 (11%)
7	15 (10%)	6 (7%)	35 (10%)
8	18 (12%)	11 (14%)	34 (10%)
9	22 (15%)	13 (16%)	53 (16%)
10 (most deprived 10%)	53 (36%)	26 (32%)	44 (13%)
Total	147 (100%)	81 (100%)	335 (100%)

The current paper concerns itself with offering descriptive analyses of the readily available data, which were not collected for the purposes of rigorous statistical analysis.

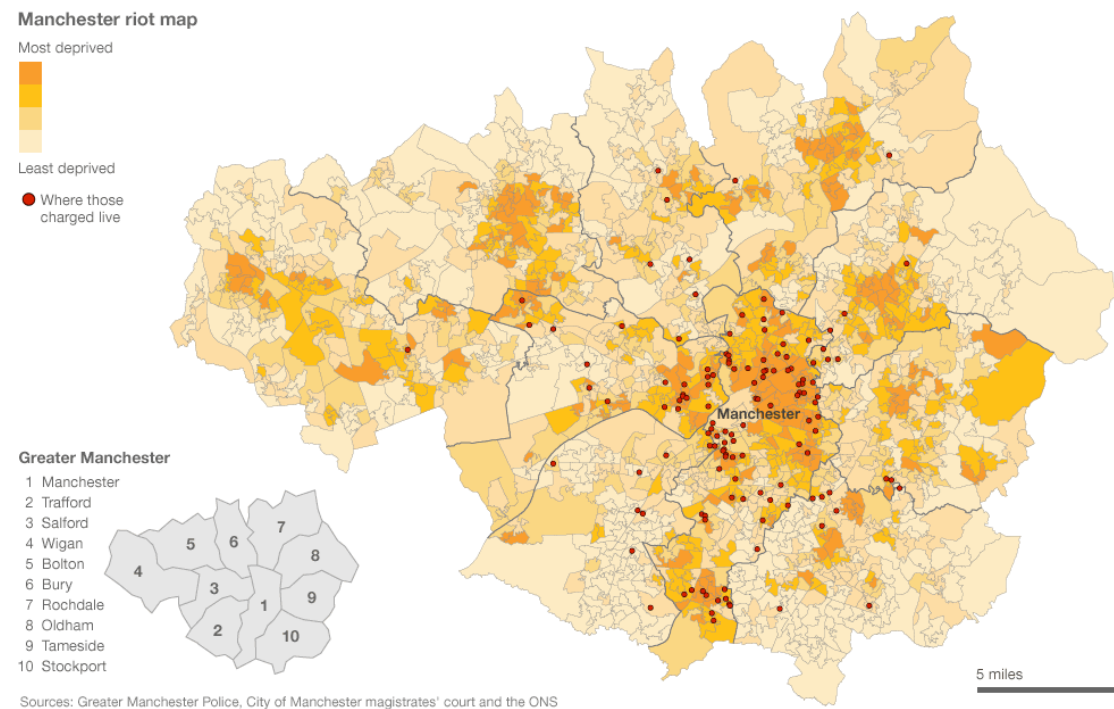
GM charge data

A significant positive association between deprivation score and number of charges in a LSOA was identified in Greater Manchester ($\rho=.191$, $p<.01$)⁶. Table 1 above (column 1) presents the number charged according to the deprivation of the area in which they lived. All Manchester areas have been ranked on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), so that a tenth of the population lives in each category (decile). This displays two very clear results: (1) some people are charged from areas of every level of deprivation, from very low to very high and (2) most are charged from areas of higher deprivation, with over a third (36.1%) of all those charged in the tenth most deprived areas. The proportion of residents charged in the riots is five times as high in more deprived areas than in less deprived areas. This is clearly displayed in the mapped representation of the data in Figure 17.

⁶ This significant positive relationship holds when examining the two largest crime types burglary and violent offences in the data ($\rho=.158$, $p<.01$ and $\rho=.132$, $p<.01$ respectively) which comprise 33.7% and 44.3% of charges respectively.

⁷ This relationship also holds across offence type, with over a third (33.7%) of those charged with burglary resident in LSOAs in the most deprived IMD decile (10); and the clear majority (84/101 cases, 83.2%) resident in the five most deprived deciles. The corresponding figures for those charged with violent offences was 43.2% (most deprived decile), and 86.4% (five most deprived deciles) respectively.

Figure 1: Map of home addresses of 197 people charged with riot-related offences at Manchester City Magistrates Court up until 23 August, plotted against levels of deprivation (IMD score) by Super Output Areas.



Reproduced with permission from the BBC <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14812819>

GM sentencing data

A significant positive association of the same strength between deprivation score and number of sentences dispensed per LSOA was identified in Greater Manchester ($\rho=.191$, $p<.01$)⁸. Table 1 above (column 2) presents the number sentenced according to the deprivation of the area in which they lived. Whilst some of those sentenced for offences perpetrated in relation to the riots in Manchester in August 2011 are resident in well-off areas, the proportion of residents involved in the riots is nearly five times as high in more deprived areas than in less deprived areas: with almost a third (32.1%) of all those charged in the tenth most deprived areas. Again, the evidence supports a clear association between deprivation and the likelihood of being sentenced for criminally riotous

⁸ This significant positive relationship holds when examining predominant offences types broken down into burglary ($\rho=.159$, $p<.01$), violence and violent disorder ($\rho=.179$, $p<.01$), other disorder ($\rho=.181$, $p<.01$) and theft ($\rho=.179$, $p<.01$), which accounted for 60%, 15%, 18% and 7%, of sentences respectively.

behaviour of those days, as there is between criminal behaviour on other occasions, this time in the sentencing data.

Merseyside charge data

A stronger positive association between deprivation score and number of charges in a LSOA was significant in Merseyside ($\rho=.279$, $p<.01$)⁹. Some of those charged with offences from the riots in Liverpool in August 2011 are resident in well-off areas. However, the proportion of residents from more deprived areas involved in the riots is one and a half times higher than in less deprived areas (see Table 1 column 3, which presents the number charged according to the deprivation of the area in which they lived¹⁰). Table 1 above (column 3) provides evidence that: (1) some people are charged from areas of every level of deprivation, from very low to very high and (2) most are charged from areas of higher deprivation, with over a quarter (29%) of all those charged in the top 20% most deprived areas. Once more, evidence supports an association between deprivation and the likelihood of being charged with criminally riotous behaviour during this period.

The most likely explanation for the stronger association in Merseyside compared to Greater Manchester is the underlying variability (variance) in deprivation between the two areas, with Greater Manchester having a greater range between more and less deprived areas and Merseyside displaying less variation with a greater concentration of deprived areas. Indeed, the Local Authority area of Liverpool remains the most deprived in England (based on rank of average score), with 14% of its LSOAs amongst the most deprived 1% in England (Liverpool City Council, 2011).

⁹ In the original format in which the data was received a large proportion of offences descriptions had been labelled as 'N/A' (117 cases) and so constrained further analysis by standardised crime type. (These include cases such as when an individual was arrested on suspicion for an offence and no further action be taken against them/charges refused or if an individual was arrested whilst on bail for offences pending further enquiries - in which case they would be re-bailed without charge and thus have been recorded as 'N/A' in this instance.)

¹⁰ All Merseyside areas have been ranked on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), so that a tenth of the population lives in each category (decile).

Discussion

The danger of ignoring deprivation and social inequality

Empirical evidence highlighting an association between deprivation and representation in the criminal justice statistics on the summer riots is presented here. Ample existing evidence suggests a well-established link between social-structural inequality (social deprivation) and criminality, especially violence. This has been a feature of crime statistics more generally (Hsieh Ching-Chiu and Pugh, 1993; Whitworth, 2011) and a backdrop of deprivation, inequality and tautological over-policing of these communities using stop and search procedures has been a feature of previous riots. Indeed, social-structural inequality also played a role in shaping the decisions of some to engage in rioting in the summer of 2011, as voiced in many of the underlying grievances rioters themselves expressed (see Guardian/LSE, 2011). However, such evidence is continually downplayed in policy responses favoured by politicians, who prefer narratives that attribute blame to 'pathological' individuals, their parents and even entire communities, rather than highlighting flaws in their own economic and/or social policy.

Whilst it has long been identified that those from disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately represented in the Criminal Justice System, disadvantaged social positioning is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for criminality. However, it is likely to be an important contextual factor alongside other risk and mediating factors (such as a suitable trigger). Those who are disenfranchised and face structural barriers to achieving their goals conceivably have less to lose in resorting to violent responses or strategies to achieve respect and status (as advocated in strain theories of crime). Furthermore, resentment as a result of exclusionary processes may make violent responses more probable (see commentaries by Wilkinson, 2004; Young, 2007). Thus aggressive responses, such as exemplary prison sentences are likely to be counter-productive, further exacerbating resentment and institutional disembeddedness.

Previous commentators on the summer riots of 2011, such as Wilkinson and Pickett (2012), have described inequality as the ‘poison’ behind them. They suggest that contributory factors such as “lack of community, family difficulties, low social mobility, poor relations between police and young people, consumerism” are interrelated and are all symptoms of inequality which can be considered the ‘cause’ – producing many social ills, including crime and violence. They argue this is because “greater inequality weakens community life, trust gives way to status competition, family life suffers, children grow up prepared for a dog-eat-dog world, class divisions and prejudices are strengthened and social mobility slows” (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2012:1). These insights are echoed by The Equality Trust (2012), and the Guardian/LSE (2011) findings which pointed to ‘a pervasive sense of injustice’ being at the heart of rioters narratives. Indeed, despite their varying backgrounds, many shared grievances to do with lack of opportunities and subjective inequality – that is how they were treated compared to other people, and injustice (Guardian/LSE, 2011). When asked about their involvement in the riots, young people in particular expressed a ‘profound sense of alienation’ (Guardian/LSE, 2011:27) and feeling as though no one cared for them.

Responding to the riots

How the summer riots of 2011 are conceptualised impacts on the nature of policy responses. Simplistic and un-contextualised frameworks rooted in deterministic positivist traditions serve to justify control of socio-economically marginalised groups in society through Foucauldian processes of over-policing and increased surveillance of deprived areas resulting in further criminalisation of their residents (Lightowlers and Shute, 2012). These can be seen in the repressive deterrent law and order tactics that followed: for example, tautological arrest procedures after the events targeting the ‘usual suspects’ (Briggs 2012b), harsh exemplary sentences resulting from a national steer to ‘ignore the rulebook’ (Bowcott, 2011; Bowcott and Bates, 2011; Boyle, 2011; Briggs, 2012b; Ford Rojas et al., 2011) and talks about benefits/tax credit cuts (Guardian, 2011a, 2011b; Levitas, 2012; LSE Public Policy Group, 2012) as well

as evicting those convicted (Guardian, 2011b, 2011c; Levitas, 2012; LSE Public Policy Group, 2012; Wandsworth Council, 2011).

The voices heard during the riots were from some of the most disenfranchised individuals in society. Failing to address some of the legitimate concerns the rioters expressed (as outlined in the Guardian/LSE (2011) report) is likely to result in further misdirected policy responses further antagonising the tensions that already exist between those in power and the economically marginalised communities on the ground by contributing to injustices as well as further impoverishing those who are economically marginalised (see Grover, 2011).

In the recent response to the riots offered by government (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2013) lip service was paid to the notion of deprivation as a contextual factor in need of addressing, but responses were quick to then cite measures aimed at developing individuals' and communities' 'economic resilience' (implying the individuals or areas themselves are pathological in a consumer society and denying structural disadvantage and locating the blame within these communities) and developing family interventions to combat poor parenting (with no discernable rationale given). Furthermore, pre-existing programmes were heralded as potential solutions, for example, strategies on tackling gang crime are proposed as part of the solution despite attempts to blame the events on gangs having been retracted soon after they emerged (see Briggs, 2012b; Harding, 2012). Further exclusionary measures such as restricting benefits and tax credits, imposing social housing sanctions and enabling landlords to evict tenants convicted of riot-related offences were all suggested as responses to the riots, with little consideration given to their potential to further antagonise the situation, perpetuate a vicious cycle of deprivation and marginalisation and enhance the divide between those who 'have' and 'belong' and those who do not. The 'social needs' of those involved are dismissed in such responses with penal intervention being given priority over social intervention (Hudson, 1993). As a result "crimes of the poor are made the focus of the criminal justice system, rather than demonstrating the circumstances which propel them into criminality" (Hudson, 1993:1).

Structural inequality and deprivation ought to be meaningfully addressed in solutions to enable more enlightened responses and, perhaps more importantly, prevent the reoccurrence of such events in the future. Accepting a need to move away from narrow conceptions of legal justice (that serve to protect and affirm existing social order and reinforce inequalities), we ought to move towards more socially just solutions and question the inevitability of imprisonment (as a method for regulating and controlling the working classes) (Hudson, 1993).

Limitations and encouraging wider ongoing debate about aetiology

Working with the available criminal justice data in this study is to implicitly accept the (political) construction of the 'problem' of the riots, in so far as it assumes an objective need to arrest and sentence the actions of those involved, to which more critical commentators may object. This constraint limits potential commentary of the role of state power that may be implicit in reproducing such deprivation. It is clear that the distribution of deprivation and representation in the criminal justice statistics, from this perspective, should not be accepted uncritically: continued debate about how to conceptualise the riots theoretically (acknowledging the role of the state, poverty, identity and consumption) remains important in making sense of these findings.

Whilst a contextual backdrop of deprivation has been identified here, the data do not allow for adequate empirical consideration of the further complex interplay of cultural context and individual motivations. However, they play an important role in developing our understanding of the context in which the events of summer 2011 occurred, which is key to understanding the disturbances - not as the actions of a pathological section of society, - rather as actions necessarily shaped and constrained by these individuals' structural positioning in society. Thus, acknowledging there is no single explanation of the riots, the findings presented here ought to be considered alongside explanations offered by other scholars from ethnographic traditions that further theorise the role of consumption in identity construction and participation in the 'riots' as well as the 'triumph of neoliberalism' (see Bauman, 2011; Treadwell et al., 2013; Briggs, 2012b; Žižek, 2011). As it is clear that the process by which "global capitalism

throws more people to the margins, whilst at the same time, offering them a way to seek a sense of self through consumption” has a part to play in explaining the ‘familiar strain’ that occurs as a result (Briggs, 2012b:395).

Conclusion

Acknowledging the structural and cultural context in which the disturbances of summer 2011 were situated is not to deny that the actions of those involved did not have very real repercussions for victims. However, to dehumanise those involved as ‘feral’ youth or deform their character by labelling them as ‘immoral’ or ‘feckless’ and to mask the rioting as ‘mindless criminality’ in order to justify inhumane ‘exemplary’ treatment is to systematically downplay any role social-economic processes may play and any silence any legitimate grievances contained in the ‘rioting’ behaviour. It also shifts “blame for social problems from the capitalist system and its rulers to the victims of recession themselves” (Hudson 1993:72). It is also no coincidence that “the recent protests witnessed across England came when many people, but especially the most marginalised, are facing particularly hard economic times” (Grover, 2011:3). To ignore these events and the messages contained in them gives a clear message that no one cares – and it is questionable whether the issues built into the triggers of disorder have been sufficiently addressed.

Responses centred on control and containment of the ‘rioters’ were favoured in criminal justice and policy responses to the riots (at the expense of promoting justice). However, repressive, exclusionary and coercive criminal justice responses ignore the fact that some of those involved are fundamentally disenfranchised and marginalised, and that their choices and their actions are likely to be shaped by this very fact. To downplay this, is to deny the socio-economic stresses they face due to systematic deprivation in so many areas of their life, the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities to socio-economic and political engagement, as well as legitimate opportunities to have their opinions/voices heard. Thus against a backdrop of cuts to public and community services, the risk of further rioting remains and responses might be more meaningfully developed around the notion of ‘social justice’. This approach

promotes governance by consent (rather than coercion) and evenly distributed rights and benefits amongst its citizens (Hudson, 1993) as well as addressing underlying social-structural conditions. After all, as Young (2007:26) notes “crime itself is an exclusion as are the attempts to control it by barriers, incarceration and stigmatization”.

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