Forcible rape is listed as a violent crime and categorized among Part 1 offenses due to its violent nature and seriousness. Forcible rape, as defined in the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, is the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will. Attempts or assaults to commit rape by force or threat of force are also included; however, statutory rape (without force) and other sex offenses are excluded (FBI.gov). Due to the seriousness of the crime, there are many myths and misconceptions that have been present in our society, some of which have been cultivated and passed along generations and others are created due to exaggeration by the media and the ‘tough on crime’ approach by the politicians. In this paper, I shall take into account ten years (2002-12) of data on forcible rape and analyze and explain the myths and realities of violent crimes with a focus on forcible rape.

The myths this paper will be covering includes the one that Barkan and Bryjak discuss in chapter 2 of their book. The first myth is that public believes crime is rising when, in fact, it is not; secondly, people think that most crime is violent when, in fact, it is not; and lastly, people overestimate the involvement of people of color and youths in crime and underestimate their victimization by crime (B&B pg.13). If we take a look at the table, we can see that from 2002 up till 2012, the number of forcible rapes reported has gone down slightly with exceptions to year 2004 and 2012 where the number were higher than the one from the previous year. We can also see that at the same time, the number for total arrest also went down. There is definitely a correlation between crimes reported and persons arrested but in this case, since in almost all ten years the crimes reported were more than four times higher than the arrest report, there isn’t a good reason for why the arrest reports are going down when the crimes in proportion are still very high. We also need to take into consideration the fact that all these crimes were reported, in other word the ones that were known to law enforcement. We have learned over the course of our semester that not all crimes are reported, especially the rape crimes. Victims in these cases do not contact the police due to various reasons including embarrassment and shame, self-blaming, fear that the police won’t believe them and their use of alcohol and other drugs prior to, or during the crime.

Since rape itself is considered as a crime of power we can see in the table that most people who were arrested were males and only few females. One of the common misconceptions about rapists is that they are viewed as hyper-sexed individual who do not have access to female partners. In fact, according to Barkan and Bryjak, a study conducted by psychologist A. Nicholas Groth found that approximately one-third of these men were married and the majority of them were involved sexually with their partners at the time they were committing these sex offenses (B&B pg.59). Our society also tends to shake the confidence of the victim by sometimes putting the blame on her. One common myth is that the rape victim was somehow responsible for the rapist’s behavior. Groth comments on the complete lack of foundation for this perspective noting that individuals from infants to senior citizens have been rape victims. “There is no place, no season, or time of the day in which a rape has never occurred, nor any specific type of person to whom it has never happened.” (B&B pg.59)

If we take into account just the reported crimes, we can make an assumption that the rate of forcible rape did go down over the period of ten years. Therefore, the myth that crime rate is rising is false. People are fed with the same news on crime over and over and as a result of media overdramatizing the reports on violent crimes, people pay disproportionate attention to these crimes and as a result they get the false impression that the crime is violent and increasing.

We have studied in our class that most people who are serving time in the prisons are minorities from lower social class and poor neighborhoods. The reason for these people being behind bars are not just because they committed a crime but also that police looks for criminals in these poor neighborhoods. The police also use a different standard for discretion based on race, age, gender and social class. However, the misconception that people have about the involvement of people of color can be challenged by looking back to the tables where we can see the difference between the numbers of whites and black those were arrested for forcible rape during that decade. Crime prevention and enforcement policies target people of color disproportionately. For every year, there are about twice as many Whites arrested compared to Blacks. The American Indian or Alaskan Native and the Asian or Pacific Islander’s numbers are as low as that of the women who were arrested for forcible rape. Therefore, through this table only, we can say that the myth about over-involvement of people of color in violent crime is false. We can also argue for the myth about over-involvement of youths in crime because we can tell from the data that the vast majority of people who were arrested were 18 years and above. Although the definition of youth is not clearly stated, most of these offenders were in their 30’s.

The graph displays a very clear visual of the difference between total crimes reported and total people arrested for those crimes. The total crimes reported and total arrests are both going down. We can see that there is a very big gap that law enforcement needs to fill in order to even catch up with the reported crimes with respect to the people arrested. Our criminal justice system functions like a funnel, with many cases such as these entering the top of the system and only a very few go to prison. Of these serious crimes, less than two-thirds are investigated by the police, because many victims do not report their crime to the police. Out of the ones that are reported, only one-fifth end in an arrest and out of those still fewer are prosecuted and convicted. For every 100 felonies that occur, only about 11 to 20 or 1.1 to 2 percent result in someone going to the jail. Some of the remaining cases are dismissed by prosecutors or judges, and others remaining result in guilty pleas to lesser charges (B&B pg 18).

Using the facts and not confirming society’s view about any aspect of crime, we can properly address all the myths and misconceptions about crime. It is very important that we find the truth for ourselves and base our theories about crime on those facts rather than relying on myths that are merely opinions that some people in the society present and some accept without contesting it.



All the data in the table above are obtained from FBI's Uniform Crime Report website. For all the years, following are the table numbers corresponding to the demographics that can be found in the fbi.gov website;

Table 29- Total reported

Table 38- By age

Table 42- By sex

Table 43- By race

Resources

Barkan, Steve E. and Bryjak, George J. Myths and Realities of Crime and Justice, (Jones and Bartlett Publisher, 2009).

http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/ucr (Tables 29, 38, 42 and 43 of years 2002-12