



Article

Tick, Tock, Boom!

A Critical Forecast on Interpersonal Violence in Post-Pandemic UK

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Abstract

This article offers a critical forecast on violent crime as the UK, and other parts of the world, begin to emerge from the global Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictive measures imposed in response. The introductory section provides a contextual discussion to frame the following three thematic sections that separately address key issues related to the issue of violence contemporarily. Following this, the article firstly places into context the rise in serious forms of violent crime across England and Wales that occurred in the years preceding the arrival of Covid-19. Secondly, it considers, briefly, the pandemic's impact upon violence, specifically the effect of lockdown upon patterns of violence. Thirdly, and finally, the article provides a critical forecast, which draws together some of the points identified in the initial introductory discussion and the preceding two sections. This final section suggest that serious violence may become a more significant issue in the UK's post-pandemic context of inequality, austerity legacy, the harms of lockdown to vulnerable groups, and the cost-of-living crisis.



Violence, Criminology and Post-Pandemic Capitalism

This article offers a critical forecast on interpersonal violence as the UK transitions towards a post pandemic state. For clarity, the term post-pandemic state, as used here, refers to the ceasing of restrictive public health measures. The use of this term by the author does not imply that the virus is no longer in circulation, nor a threat to public health. This opening section of the article provides brief pointers towards post-pandemic shifts in political economy that should be prioritised for analysis and theoretical explanation by criminology because of their potential consequences for violence, harm and governance more broadly. This section also briefly considers some critical points in relation to the discipline's mainstream theoretical corpus, which has been criticised recently from differing positions. Some of these critiques are acknowledged here and used to inform the critical forecast presented in the final section of the article.

As this article will discuss in more detail, serious violent crime in England and Wales had been increasing considerably in the years immediately preceding the Covid-19 pandemic. Criminological interest and engagement with this sudden increase was fairly limited at the time. The discussions that did take place, often dominated by the media and politicians, were largely confined to matters of 'toxic masculinity', gangs, cuts to the police, poverty, and Drill music (Ellis, 2019). This is not to say these issues were and are irrelevant for understanding violence, only that these debates very often lacked sufficient attention to the complexity of this trend. It was here that mainstream criminological theory, if it had been in a better position to address questions of contextualised aetiology, could have interjected more forcefully into that debate (ibid).

More important questions to ask now though, are how, and in what manner, the pandemic and the post-pandemic context might 'interact' with the varying conditions that had contributed to increasing violence? The possible drivers of increased knife-enabled crime and violence towards women in domestic settings, for example, will not have simply subsided following the arrival of a respiratory viral pandemic and the associated public health measures enacted in response. Relatedly then, it is pertinent to ask what impact the pandemic and the evolving background of global political economy may have upon violence in the future? These are significant issues to which criminology must devote attention.

The Covid-19 pandemic is the most disruptive global event so far of the 21st Century. The pandemic had important impacts upon violence (Eisner and Nivette, 2020) that this article will discuss in more detail. Lockdowns restricted options for exiting violent intimate relationships, largely affecting women, and altered the delivery of frontline services in regular contact with children and young people at risk of becoming victims and/or themselves perpetrators of violence (Briggs et al, 2021c). For these reasons, and others that will be considered in this article, the pandemic may have considerable affects upon violence in the future (Ellis, et al, 2021). Although the harm and disruption the pandemic generated must be situated against the context into which the virus emerged. The virus emerged into a world still feeling tremors from the global financial crisis almost a decade earlier. Economic inequality, populist movements from the Right and the Left, Brexit, and the presidency of Donald Trump, were all symptomatic

of issues to which the neoliberal system of governance and variant of capitalism could not provide adequate solutions. Nevertheless, neoliberalism continued in a zombified state in the years before Covid-19 (Peck, 2010), while its ineptitude was only further exposed through poor governance of the pandemic (Briggs et al, 2021a; Jones and Hameiri, 2021).

Many have speculated already upon how the covid crisis might impact upon the future of politics and the global economy, especially given neoliberalism's zombification and the growth of populist movements in the years after the financial crisis (Briggs et al, 2020; Gerbaudo, 2021; Hochuli et al, 2021; Schwab and Malleret, 2020). Social theorist Paolo Gerbaudo (2021) recently referred to the post-pandemic period in the West as 'The Great Recoil', suggesting that the embryonic neo-statism that began to develop in the years prior to Covid-19's arrival will now override the tainted reputation of globalism and the free market dogma of the neo-liberal era. This evolving context raises significant new questions for the discipline of criminology, particularly in relation to impacts upon victimisation, crime and harm, and the role that states in the post-pandemic future will occupy in the regulation of citizens and the capitalist system.

In a recent and notably prescient analysis of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), Hall et al (2022) conclude by noting the importance for criminology of understanding the evolution of post-pandemic capitalism and the tensions this may generate with regards to regulation, notions of sovereignty, as well as the harms emerging from within and that will also spill out of these spaces into the wider environment and populace. In their analysis of SEZs they identify quite contradictory developments at a wider level of governance that indicate an acceleration of 'certain varieties of privatisation while also demanding new, advanced forms of social, governmental and macroeconomic intervention' (15).

Indeed, such changes are contradictory in that firstly, they signal capitalist development is potentially now evolving beyond neoliberalism into a more 'retrogressive' condition akin to feudalism that intensifies processes of capital accumulation under the banners of 'national prosperity' and 'growth'. While secondly, different actors and agencies are now engaged in lobbying for changes in forms of regulation and control that evidences changing expressions of sovereignty and 'in many ways draw similarities with the local arrangements found in feudal societies' (ibid: 14). Lightly regulated markets and spaces of para-sovereignty, such as SEZs, will be justified ideologically as a means for states to attract investment and generate growth in the wake of the economic consequences of the pandemic. While, simultaneously, continuing to provide spaces that act as safe havens for investments and assets, signifying commitment to capital accumulation for elites that has been a long-standing historical feature of capitalism that was briefly interrupted most recently by the mid-20th Century post-war consensus (Harvey, 2005).

Of course, state interventions, such as the Furlough Scheme, exposed further the myth that the state had 'gone away' under neoliberalism and demonstrated that its power and resources had rather been oriented to better serve the needs of capital (Mitchell and Fazi, 2017). The unprecedented (in more recent history at least) scale of state intervention in response to Covid-19 signalled the possibility that states could yet assume a more active role in alleviating other contemporary threats to human wellbeing. In particular, the myriad and imminent threats from

capital accumulation regimes, economic inequality, environmental change and consequent large-scale human migration, as well as the current inflationary crisis. Violence arising from these conditions will largely harm more structurally disadvantaged groups and may ultimately pose serious risks to the maintenance of social order, particularly in parts of the Global South (Moncada, 2013; Parenti, 2011). It is incumbent then on criminology to scrutinise closely these varying developments during a period when more effective democratic governance and state intervention are arguably required to address crises that are emerging on a global scale. Simultaneously, the discipline must also adapt existing, as well as develop new, theoretical ideas to offer explanations of these affects upon violence and other forms of harm.

On the issue of violence and future violence, which is this article's central concern, criminology currently lacks, some have argued, suitable theoretical frameworks through which to explain violence, as well as crime and harm more generally, in the contemporary era. Some have argued that the discipline has been, and remains, stuck in an aetiological crisis (Hall, 2012), still reliant upon outdated ideas that bear little resemblance to the complexity of human subjectivity and that cannot fully grasp contemporary crises (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007; Hall and Winlow, 2015; Raymen, 2021). Writing around a decade ago, criminologist Simon Winlow (2012) argued that human violence has been largely treated as a 'tangential' issue within criminology and that renewed theoretical attention to the generative bases of violence and violent subjectivities in the contemporary era was needed. Sociology, a significant importer of ideas to criminology, has also been accused of routinely neglecting the importance of violence for understanding social formations and relations both historically and contemporarily (Ray, 2011). Walby (2012) describes this 'marginalisation' of violence as a product of the dominance of accounts of violence that draw inspiration from the 'civilising process' (Pinker, 2012) and that locate the 'problem' of violence at society's peripheries from a now stable civilised core.

More recently, and with colleagues, Walby (2015) has offered a strong critique of both sociological and criminological attempts to explain violence. Walby et al focus their critique upon staple 'mainstream' contributions to criminological theory, such as anomie, control and subcultural theories. The key thrust of their critique is the collective neglect of gender within these theories and the pressing need to integrate into mainstream theory contributions that currently occupy a sub-disciplinary area addressing gender-based violence. These are significant critical points, further reinforced by the 'shadow pandemic' of violence against women and girls that accompanied the global spread of Covid-19. Addressing this issue more directly, Walklate (2021) has recently argued that when confronted with the gendered nature of crime during the pandemic criminology can no longer regard feminism as a 'stranger' nor ignore the significance of gender as a structuring variable in crime.

While interpersonal violence is highly gendered, gender in isolation is not the sole structuring division driving trends in serious violence and needs to be considered alongside political economy, especially as this looks set to mutate and arguably already is mutating. The distribution of serious interpersonal violence contemporarily largely coincides 'with the spatial consequences of neoliberal restructuring' (Ray, 2011: 82), which has been significant in driving

divergent trends in serious violence since the second half of the 20th Century (Dorling, 2004; Ellis, 2019). Neoliberal capitalism has generated contrasting fortunes for human populations in terms of their exposure to interpersonal violence and other harms by carving out spatial enclaves across the globe that are securely contained, highly exclusive and attract capital. Simultaneously, the chasm in material wealth between the world's richest and poorest that has burgeoned during neoliberalism's reign has created other spatial enclaves characterised by extreme neglect, expulsion and capital flight where interpersonal violence is a more prominent issue (Atkinson and Millington, 2019).

As neoliberalism dies what some are describing as a very slow death (Streeck, 2016) how the reconfigured global political economy might shape trends in violence requires criminology's attention. It is vital then, especially as economies re-configure into potentially more 'retrogressive' forms (Hall et al, 2022) and states adapt to 'govern' capitalism and social life post-pandemic, that criminological theory is attentive to the impacts upon these existing social structures that are strongly linked to violence as well as the spaces that currently experience greater levels of violent behaviour.

This brief opening discussion and the literature cited represent some crucial critical interjections into the discipline's 'mainstream' theoretical canon, which risks becoming further ossified if it does not address the emerging political economic context and its wide-ranging consequences. Given the complexity and the significance of what has begun to be outlined here, this article now attempts to address tentatively some of these conditions and their impacts upon violence in the UK context through a 'critical forecast'. To this end, the article is divided into three additional substantive sections.

In the next section, the article firstly explores the 'epidemic' of violence in England and Wales prior to the arrival of Covid-19, situating this against the socio-economic context of the post-recession, austerity period. In the second section, the impact of the pandemic upon violence is considered briefly from some of the available evidence. In particular, the paper addresses the purported reduction in public forms of violence and reported rises in violence located in private, domestic dwellings. This general trend was observed internationally, with the UN referring to domestic abuse, and violence against women and girls generally, as a pandemic that has shadowed the spread of Covid-19. Research indicated, as restrictions were eased in England Wales in 2020, that public forms of violence also increased, particularly in deprived neighbourhoods, which justifies further an attentiveness to gender and social class in relation to violence going forward. Finally, the third section of the article provides a critical forecast and conclusion. This final section takes account of the key issues raised in the preceding sections.

The Epidemic before the Pandemic

Prior to the arrival of Covid-19, England and Wales had been experiencing what was described as an 'epidemic' of violence. With reference to recent changes in levels of knife-enabled violence within the country, Chair of the Police Federation John Apter spoke of British society becoming 'a more violent place'. Similarly, the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime,

Labour MP Sarah Jones, claimed this epidemic was escalating to such a degree that it should be considered a 'state of emergency' (Dearden, 2020).

This epidemic of violence arrived after a prolonged period of reported decline in the numbers of serious violent crimes. This decline had provided some welcome relief following the frightening ascent of recorded homicides in the UK, and across other Western nations, from the late 1970s to the late 1990s. It has been suggested that the prolonged period of decline that followed the end of the 20th Century could be attributed to alterations in routine activities and lifestyles of particular groups, the adoption of criminal justice initiatives focused specifically upon reducing serious violence between men, and the wider securitisation of many Western nations (Miles and Buehler, 2020). While the recent increase in the overall homicide rate immediately prior to Covid-19 has not reached the levels that were recorded during the late 1990s, the increased frequency of serious violence in this recent period posed some significant questions about why the pattern of decline reversed.

Between 2015-18, the overall homicide rate in England and Wales increased by 39% and this was largely driven by violent incidents involving knives and sharp implements (Morgan et al., 2020). In 2018, killings by a knife or sharp instrument were the highest ever recorded (ONS, 2020a). Police-recorded crime and NHS hospital admissions data, both confirmed that there had been consecutive recorded rises in violent offences involving knives that began around 2015 (ONS, 2019). In March 2020, offences involving knives were the highest recorded since 2011, with the bulk of these recorded offences largely concentrated in the poorer districts of several large English cities (Grierson, 2020). Younger males from deprived neighbourhoods were the predominant victims of this wave of lethal weapon-enabled violence in public spaces, as they had been during the last period of consecutive increases in homicide that occurred during the final decades of the 20th Century (Dorling, 2004; Morgan et al, 2020). Analysis of stabbings that occurred in London during this most recent epidemic period before Covid-19 were found to be greatest amongst young males from deprived neighbourhoods (Vulliamy et al, 2018). Focused analysis conducted by the Home Office on the increased homicides reported during the period prior to Covid-19 found strong correlations with deprivation, with a greater proportion of recent killings concentrated in the most deprived parts of the country (Morgan et al, 2020).

This analysis by the Home Office referred to a range of possible short and long term 'drivers' operating at micro and macro levels that may have contributed to these rises (Morgan et al, 2020). It is difficult to disentangle and isolate the direct effects of these specific drivers upon the changes in recorded levels of violence observed prior to Covid-19, and questions remain with regards to whether they were the product of short or long term drivers. The report's authors suggest specific short-term drivers may have had greater affects upon certain forms of homicide that have contributed disproportionately to pushing up the overall rate in the pre-pandemic period. For instance, increases in drug-related homicides resulting from rivalries and feuds between younger males involved in the distribution of illicit substances, which accounted for more than half of the recent overall increase. Evolving drug distribution methods referred to as 'county lines', where violent drug distributors located in overcrowded urban markets establish

potentially more lucrative operations in rural and coastal towns, have been implicated in this upsurge of recent killings as well as increased knife-enabled crime outside of large urban areas (Robinson et al, 2019).

While the distinction between shorter and longer-term drivers in the Home Office's recent report (Morgan et al 2020) is a helpful one, they are by no means mutually exclusive and should not be regarded as such. Rather, their complex interaction should be acknowledged and recognised. In the case of short-term drivers for recent drug-related homicides for instance, these cannot be separated from the longer-term destabilising effects of neoliberalism and attendant de-industrialisation of Western economies. These longer-term changes to political economy disproportionately affected life in working class communities and the institutions representing their political interests, which provide an important historical backdrop to serious violent crime in economically disadvantaged areas.

Previous experience of being violently assaulted, fear for personal safety, lack of trust in the police, and association with delinquent peers, have all been identified as factors that drive weapon-carrying, and use, contemporarily (Brennan, 2019). Persistent possession of weapons and the use of serious violence also correlate with intensifying forms of disadvantage in which legitimate unskilled and skilled work are minimal and 'conflict has become a way of life, from bullying at school to 'turf' and neighbourhood rivalries' (Squires, 2009: 143). Preparedness for violence, as well as the carrying and use of weapons amongst specific groups of younger men and boys, can be understood then as a partial reflection of contemporary 'neighbourhood and urban conditions in which absence of work opportunity and labour market discrimination generate more insecure male identities' (Atkinson and Millington, 2019: 209). These identities are primed for engagement in criminal markets or are at greater risk of recruitment into, and exploitation within, drug distribution networks.

In-depth research exploring the lives of this demographic of younger men that inhabit spaces subject to multiple forms of deprivation and who experience the greatest risks of being stabbed or murdered, reveals for some of them multiple traumatic experiences of victimisation and perpetration across both domestic and public spaces. Their early childhood socialisation was often characterised by threat, insecurity, and a process of psycho-somatic 'hardening' (Ellis et al, 2017). Examination of county lines drug distribution networks indicates the vulnerability of these groups of young men, who, with limited options in today's economy, are more likely to believe drug markets offer lucrative financial rewards and social status (Robinson et al, 2019).

Importantly, what envelops these microcosmic spaces of insecurity, aggressive interpersonal competition and hopelessness that dot the contemporary British landscape, is deepening economic inequality, the harmful consequences of the recent austerity programme, and culture at the 'end of the end of history' (Hochuli et al, 2021). This is a period in which no viable alternatives to neoliberal capitalism and consumerism have emerged. In addition, workers' movements have been severely dis-empowered and seen their membership dwindle. Wages across many sectors have experienced severe and prolonged compression, while public services have been subject to privatisation and rounds of efficiency savings (Mitchell and Fazi, 2017). It has

been suggested that a perpetual monotony of the present has persisted during this period, in which many people have become de-politicised, infatuated with consumer lifestyles, and gripped by a sense of hopelessness and cynicism concerning the future (Hochuli et al, 2021).

Indeed, young people growing up during the ascent and eventual zombification of neoliberalism have become caught in a structural and cultural pincer movement. Economic restructuring and the widening of inequality during the late 20th and early 21st centuries have had considerable effects upon many young people's lives, particularly those from working class communities. Many young people face the choice of low wage employment that is de-unionised and lacking positive symbolism (Lloyd, 2019), or continued post-18 education and the considerable amounts of personal indebtedness that accompany this (Dorling, 2015).

As a result, many young people have become increasingly dependent upon parents and carers, remaining in the 'youth' phase of the life course for much longer than previous generations. Simultaneously, consumer culture has infantilised younger adults, blurring the boundaries between previously more clearly demarcated phases of the life course (Hayward, 2012), while plugging considerable numbers of young people into cyclic routines of consumer-based hedonism and pleasure-seeking (Fisher, 2009; Winlow and Hall, 2006). The tantalising lure of consumer items combined with restricted education and employment opportunities, have generated a 'toxic trap' for some particularly disadvantaged young males attracted to the high-risks but potential quick-wins of illicit drug distribution (Irwin-Rogers, 2019).

While rates of lethal violence against women have remained lower than that of men in England and Wales since around the middle of the 20th Century, the numbers of women killed from violence also began to increase immediately prior to the arrival of Covid-19. Between the year ending March 2017 and March 2019, the number of women killed by violence rose from 165 to 241 (ONS, 2020a). Several years earlier, following the 2008 recession and contrary to the findings of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), violence against women had been increasing and in part due to repeated incidents of victimisation that had been removed from the analysis of data gathered through the CSEW (Walby et al, 2016). Walby et al (2016) argued that these trends not only revealed long suspected inadequacies in mainstream victimisation survey instruments, but also cast doubt upon claims that periodic rises in violence are mere blips and temporary diversions from the longer-term historical precedent of declining violence (Pinker, 2012). More specifically though, these trends reveal and further reinforce the routine and repeated nature of men's violence towards women in intimate settings (Walby et al, 2016).

The Coalition government's austerity agenda had a further damaging and disproportionate effect upon women and vulnerable groups of young people, generally heightening their risks of experiencing violence. Programmes of cuts restricted women's opportunities to exit abusive relationships by reducing their incomes, enhancing their economic dependency upon abusive men and reducing the resources available to refuges offering accommodation and support for the victims of intimate abuse (Walby et al, 2016). Alterations to welfare provision scaled back benefits for young people, including access to housing benefit, and introduced a punitive system of sanctions for 'non-compliance'. Research exploring the

impacts of these welfare reforms in conjunction with limited job opportunities in one region found young people in precarious situations turning to the informal economy, in which the risks individuals face of experiencing violence increase considerably (Bond and Hallsworth, 2017). While research with school staff and youth workers found that with fewer resources available many experienced considerable difficulties in providing sufficient support, care and guidance for young males more at-risk of engaging in violence and becoming gang-affiliated (Irwin-Rogers et al, 2020).

To some extent, evidence of increased interpersonal violence prior to the pandemic was the result of a complex array of shorter and longer ‘drivers’ that shared an inter-dependent relationship. How these drivers were affected by the arrival of the pandemic will be considered in the final section. Before addressing this, the article will briefly consider the more direct impact of the pandemic upon trends and patterns in interpersonal violence.

The Arrival of Covid-19 and the Secondary Pandemic

The arrival of the novel coronavirus, Covid-19, to the UK’s shores in 2020 sparked an unprecedented set of public health measures designed to curb transmission of the virus. In the absence of known effective treatments, management of the virus hinged upon the imposition of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs), which included the full closure or curtailing of economic sectors that were deemed ‘non-essential’, social distancing, and confinement to homes. Reliance upon these measures across nations within the UK endured to varying degrees throughout 2020 and 2021 in response to recorded transmission levels and the number of cases requiring hospitalisation. The arrival of Covid-19 and imposition of these varying measures generates significant questions regarding their interaction with the conditions precipitating violence. This is especially pertinent in the case of England and Wales, where, as the previous section indicated, violence was becoming a more significant, arguably endemic issue.

While the almost immediate over-night ceasing of social contact and interaction between members of different households drastically reduced the potential for some serious forms of violence involving predominantly groups of disadvantaged young males in public spaces, this measure was temporary and arguably does little to disturb the structural underlying causes of such violence; if anything, it potentially generates further risks, as will be considered in the final section of this article. Simultaneously, reduced violence in public does not seem to have been matched by reduced violence in domestic spaces, where risks appear to have been potentially heightened in part as an unintended consequence of the imposition of these restrictive measures.

As Eisner and Nivette (2020) noted, there are discernible ‘generators’, or what were referred to in the previous section as ‘drivers’, of violence arising as a direct result of the pandemic. These too can also be considered either proximal or distant given their potential to have immediate, or more longer-term, affects upon levels of violence. More proximal generators, that the previous section referred to as short-term drivers, are likely to have more immediate impacts upon violence patterns and pertain largely to aspects of what criminologists often refer to as ‘routine activities’. Distant generators, which are more difficult to isolate and measure in

terms of affects, refer to the psychological, social and economic effects from the pandemic and that are more likely to exert an influence upon levels of violence at a later longer point in time. It is likely then that these generators will exert differential influence as the pandemic evolves, and, as it eventually subsides.

From a 'routine activities' perspective, which addresses the more proximal violence generators, such as, opportunities to commit violence and 'weakened' targets, the requirement to remain at home and the closure of various institutional and social settings dramatically altered the situational dynamics of possible violence as has been alluded to already. By virtue of greater time being spent in domestic dwellings and amongst those with whom individuals share a home, the risks of violent abuse and harm occurring within this setting increase considerably. While the closure of the night-time economy, schools, retail, reduced public transport, and bans on public gatherings, greatly reduced many of the situations in which violence may take place in public.

These general assertions have been borne out to some extent by the evidence emerging from studies assessing the pandemic's impact upon different forms of violence. Recorded crime data gathered internationally confirmed that many societies experienced declines in public forms of violence as various health measures designed to reduce human contact were initiated (Eisner and Nivette, 2020). Internationally, numerous studies suggested that recorded incidents of violent abuse, particularly in domestic settings, were possibly increasing and disproportionately affecting women and children (Ellis et. al, 2021). Although conclusions remain cautious and rightly so given the difficulties of establishing genuine rises in non-lethal forms of violence. However, early indications do confirm similar overall trends within the UK, with reported increases in intimate-partner abuse and child-to-parent violence (Condry et al, 2020; Ivandic et al, 2020) largely found in domestic dwellings.

Evans et al (2020) found that in some states in the US there were reductions in calls to domestic abuse helplines when lockdown measures were first implemented, this was despite anticipation of increased demand. Rather than an indication of reduced levels of abuse, reduced demand for support was considered the result of victims' fears of reaching out for help while abusers were more regularly present in the home and likely to be subjecting the former to more intense and prolonged surveillance and control. The economic consequences of the pandemic in the US also made exiting abusive relationships more difficult once restrictions were eased, with women of colour, immigrants and those without a college education identified as more likely to find themselves financially entangled with abusive men (ibid).

Pandemics of infectious diseases engender emotional states in humans, that, for some, may heighten the potential for engaging in aggressive and violent behaviour (Peterman et al., 2020). Stay at home orders, as well as the closing down of societal institutions and sectors of the economy concentrated most human activities within domestic dwellings, which became hubs of work, education and social life. Sudden and prolonged confinement to homes may significantly affect family dynamics. More time spent at home in the presence of abusers with restricted access to support, heightens vulnerability of potential victims. Stress and tension resulting from

prolonged confinement heightens perpetration risks. This is particularly an issue in families where there is an historical precedent of abusive behaviour. The uncertainties and pressures that may arise concerning family finances, or the employment status of individual members, may also induce stress and further heighten the possibility of conflict and abusive behaviour. Previous studies, particularly in East Asian societies that have experienced outbreaks of several respiratory viruses in recent years, do confirm increased incidents of interpersonal violence within families during pandemics (Zhang, 2020).

The threat of violence within domestic settings outside of pandemic contexts, particularly its gendered nature, are well known and documented. On this point, Sandra Walklate (2020) has argued the crime and harm that occurred during the pandemic was a continuation of the intimidation and abuse that many women and children experience routinely from men who are often known to them. Rather than the pandemic acting as a cause of gendered violence, it should be regarded as an event that heightened the vulnerabilities of groups already disadvantaged and likely to experience abuse from men.

As restrictions eased in England and Wales and greater movement and interaction between citizens were allowed once again, violence reportedly increased in the most deprived parts of the country and exceeded the levels that had been recorded immediately prior to the pandemic in those areas (Kirchmaier and Villa-Llera, 2020). In addition, the numbers of people seeking treatment in A&E for violence-related injuries in England and Wales increased after the easing of restrictions from the lockdowns that were implemented during 2020 and 2021 (BBC, 2022). Not only does violent harm experienced during the pandemic period appear to be highly gendered, but it also weighs heavily upon the most deprived. These issues, as well as others that emerge from this and the preceding section of this article, will now be considered further as part of a critical forecast on violence in post-pandemic UK.

Discussion: A Critical Forecast

Evidence suggests that the UK was insufficiently prepared for a viral pandemic and that neoliberal states proved throughout the Covid-19 crisis to be 'dysfunctional for solving very basic social problems' (Jones and Hameiri, 2021: 21). Indeed, the austerity agenda had considerably weakened health and social care in the UK prior to 2020, which hampered attempts to respond during the pandemic and resulted in avoidable deaths and considerable harm to frontline health professionals (Briggs et al, 2021b).

The legitimacy of neoliberalism across Western nations was already in serious question before Covid-19, with several examples of political and populist movements forming in direct opposition to many of its key tenets, yet unable to succeed it. The virus has revealed further neoliberalism's various weaknesses and accelerated the transition towards possibly new political arrangements in numerous states. The political substance of these new arrangements is not entirely clear yet but may take forms that seek to straddle state-led capitalism alongside more conservative values that fit a 'post neoliberal model', in which elements of the neoliberal system

remain (Hochuli et al, 2021). This transition remains laboured, accompanied by a range of ‘morbid symptoms’ that are characteristic of the ‘interregnum’ that some theorists argue has persisted while neoliberalism dies a slow death in the absence of a viable alternative system to replace it (Sassoon, 2021; Streeck, 2016).

The likely eventual ‘death’ of neoliberalism does not necessitate that a more just political economic system will follow though, or that important principles of neoliberalism itself, particularly economic ones, will disappear entirely as addressed in the previous paragraph. As was also stated in the opening section of this article, early signs indicate an evolution in capitalism, accumulation patterns and attendant state sovereignty that, so far, appear to represent a resurgence of aspects of historic accumulation and governance regimes, particularly those resembling feudalism (Hall et al, 2022). If these emerging developments offer some basis for tentative speculation, one can likely assume that they will continue to generate conditions conducive for capital expansion and accumulation that benefit groups holding considerable wealth and assets.

The current global threats of climate change, economic inequality, and more recently high inflation are intimately connected to capitalism’s contemporary productive, extractive and consumption processes. The most recent threat of high inflation is arguably the result of the effects of excess corporate power and resultant profit-margins built up since the 1970s, combined with bottlenecks in supply-chains resulting from the pandemic (Tooze, 2022). This crisis is reflective of the current distribution of power between capital and labour that has developed through neoliberal economic policies. That relationship may yet shift depending upon the outcome of what will likely be other industrial conflicts that will follow recent action by the RMT Union in the UK. What this and other global crises generate in the post-pandemic context then, is heightened tension between capitalism’s core historic tendencies and renewed demands for enhanced forms of protection and support as global threats become increasingly disruptive to social life and impinge directly upon the lives of individuals.

For criminology to begin to make sense of the potential implications of this evolving context for interpersonal violence it would be prescient to, first, recall these important, poignant and straightforward words about its genesis:

For murder rates to rise in particular places, and for a particular group of people living there, life in general has to be made more difficult to live, people have to be made to feel more worthless (Dorling, 2004: 190)

Straightforwardly, current conditions appear at first glance to be conducive to increased levels of interpersonal violence in varying forms. Indeed, a recent report by the Global Peace Index suggests that the global pandemic has ushered in ‘a new wave of tension and uncertainty’ (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020: 2) on top of rising incidents of civil unrest in Europe during the period 2011-2018, nearly half of which were violent in nature.

The cost-of-living crisis in the UK alone will make life for many that are structurally disadvantaged increasingly difficult in the way Dorling suggests, that much is certain. What will likely accompany this are renewed feelings of worthlessness combined with, for some, an emboldened sense of ‘special liberty’ (Hall, 2012), as they find themselves disadvantaged in capitalism’s disavowed inequality structures yet psychically captured by its potent status symbols and consumerism.

Public trust and faith in elites was fragile before Covid-19 in the UK, but has arguably worsened following repeated accusations of corruption within government as well as revelations concerning the failure of various ministers and officials to follow public-health measures imposed during the pandemic. Early on, accusations of corruption in the process of the procurement of UK government contracts for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) began to surface (Conn et al, 2021). As was often the case throughout the pandemic, the ‘state of exception’ (Ahearne and Frudenthal, 2021) generated at this time of unprecedented crisis became a convenient justification for various governmental actions or inactions, decision-making, and a general lack of due diligence or oversight. As the pandemic continued, the acting Health Secretary’s affair with his aide and evidence of parties held at Downing Street and attended by the Prime Minister himself surfaced. These various revelations against the contextual backdrop of neoliberalism’s various failures, have culminated in a considerable crisis of legitimacy that now presents itself in an incumbent Prime Minister awaiting a successor.

The dysfunction evident through the mismanagement of the pandemic extends further to the post-pandemic period of recovery, which in its current guise will not likely sufficiently address the various socio-economic issues generated before the pandemic’s arrival and that the pandemic itself has further exacerbated. A recent report examining the consequences of benefit cuts and the withdrawal of the Furlough scheme in one of the most deprived districts of England, suggests these changes, alongside rises in the cost of living, are creating a pending poverty catastrophe in the area and within geographical areas experiencing similar levels of deprivation and disadvantage (Etherington et al, 2022). The government’s ‘levelling up’ agenda is unlikely to fully address the complex legacy of distrust, cynicism, and harm caused by the virus and the government’s handling of the crisis. Neither will it prove sufficient to tackle the longer-term legacies of de-industrialisation and the more recent post-recession austerity programme that had further entrenched deprivation across numerous parts of the country. While the paucity of measures in the latest budget announcement to temper the spike in fuel and energy prices, as well as other commodities, provides a strong indication of insufficient political will to act upon those conditions that could provide the generative basis for social unrest in the future.

It was suggested recently that the cumulative effects of Covid-19 and the lockdowns initiated in response, had possibly started a ticking time bomb of future harm through the activation of more distant, or longer-term violence generators that will not be immediately felt (Ellis, 2021). On the contrary, these are more likely to be ‘slow’ in their affects upon individuals and communities, but with exponential potential to spark off violent incidents and conflicts (Ellis, 2022). The spiralling costs of living are likely to only enhance the vulnerability of those

households on low-incomes or that are without a wage-earner. These conditions are likely to fuel feelings of desperation and hopelessness, which risk transforming into resentment and anger, particularly amongst men with few prospects. These conditions are also likely to reduce the options available to those trying to exit or escape abusive home lives. Just as many abused women struggled to escape during the turbulent years that followed the economic crisis of 2008, many potentially face an immediate future of entrapment and enforced dependency as avenues to exit abusive relationships may begin to close off.

Given the complex, yet possible, links between trauma and violent behaviour, experiencing and witnessing abuse during the confinement of lockdowns may yet serve as a particularly potent generator of future violence amongst some individuals, particularly if this is combined with a bleak and prolonged period of recovery after the pandemic (Ellis et.al, 2021). Additionally, low trust and lack of legitimacy often correlate with increased violence in societies (Ellis, 2019), as does personal preparation for violent conflict when combined with prior experience of violent victimisation (Brennan, 2021). If some economically disadvantaged and vulnerable young people were at greater risk of experiencing and or committing violent harm before the pandemic, it is difficult to see how this will have changed as a result of it.

While evidence still needs to be collated on the impacts of the pandemic and its interaction with the socio-economic conditions that preceded it, some voices from frontline services supporting families, as well as disadvantaged children and young people at-risk of abuse, exploitation or engaging in crime, have spoken about the chasm that has opened-up between them and those they tried to support throughout the lockdowns (Briggs et al, 2021c). Re-connecting with vulnerable groups to provide support now restrictive measures across the UK have ceased is vital, but likely to present significant challenges. Indeed, the National Youth Agency (2020) has reported recently on the detriment of Covid-19 measures to the many years of work spent developing trust and positive working relationships with vulnerable young people. Notwithstanding the pandemic's potential to heighten vulnerabilities, as has been discussed already, the National Youth Agency report raises several concerns about the exploitation of young people online during periods of lockdown and the risks this poses in terms of involvement in illicit markets and attendant levels of future violence.

The future remains uncertain, but increasingly points towards the gathering of proverbial storm clouds. Criminology must now direct its attention towards understanding and theorising these developments with a firm theoretical focus on mutating political economy and its affects upon structuring divisions, as well as various forms of interpersonal violence and harm more generally.

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