UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
Terrorism Research Center

Terrorism & Homeland Security Research
Crime & Security Data Analysis Lab
Educational Training & Internship Programs

Article Summary

Institutional Isolation and Crime: The Mediating Effect of Disengaged Youth on Levels of Crime

Author(s): Shaun A. Thomas and Edward S. Shihadeh
Summary by: Madeline Shanahan, University of Arkansas

Summary

This article studies the impact of institutionally isolated youth on crime by comparing age, crime, and institutional isolation. It describes institutionally isolated youth as "floaters" who do not have the same social controls on them that institutionalized youth might. The authors present the idea that there is an obvious relation between age and crime already established in research but points out how other research has failed to examine it on the aggregate level. This research aims to analyze it from that aspect by combining both macro and micro-level statistics to create the spatial aggregate values.

Methods

The current study used the U.S. Census of Population and Housing, the County Business Patterns reports, 2000 Presidential Election voter turnout, and reports from the 2000 Uniform Crime Reports for US counties. Additionally, the study examined available literature and criticized the depth of it, focusing mostly on what they overlooked. It used US counties and county equivalents that had a reporting rate average of 80% as the spatial unit (77% of the US counties in total) and examined data on violent and property crimes. The institutionally isolated ages ranged from 15 to 25. The dependent variables were the levels of homicide, robbery, burglary, and aggravated assault on a 3-year average rate per 100,000 residents. Homicides are rarer, so the study used an estimation technique for more traditional counts. It then compared these results to the institutionally isolated youths and those in civic disengagement. controls for the current study were total youth, social-ecological effects on crime rates, racial segregation, and regional differences. Finally, Sobel tests were used to decide the statistical significance of the results.

Results

When examining the literature, researchers found that most studies looked purely at age while ignoring social contexts, that there was a wide age range involving ages that do not typically engage in crime, and that some larger youth populations actually decrease crime. For the empirical data, the average homicide rates were 3.77, for assault 216.76, for robbery 44.55, and for burglary 588.58. Disengaged youth rates were 0.517. Floaters were found to be more common in places with socioeconomic disadvantages and less common inracially segregated areas and larger youth populations. Institutionally isolated youth significantly impacted the level of homicide rates by an increase of 10.6%, and increased the assault rate by 7.2%, the robbery rates by 5%, and had a positive increase with the burglary rates as well. Overall, there was a positive correlation on violent and property crime rates with institutionally isolated youth.

Implications

To prevent these high rates of crime among institutionally isolated youth, social institutions must incorporate vulnerable citizens into the social controls already available to those more privileged.

Aggregated levels of institutional isolation contributed to more floaters, while civil engagement did not. Even though these floaters make up 1% of the population, they have a massive impact on crime. These few people may also continue to participate in criminal activity into adulthood or show other youth the excitement of institutional isolation, which as a result may increase crime even further.

For more information, see Thomas, S. A., & Shihadeh, E. S. (2013). Institutional isolation and crime: The mediating effect of disengaged youth on levels of crime. *Social Science Research*, *42*(5), 1167-1179.