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Examining the Role of Life Satisfaction and Negative Emotionality in a Social Disorganization Framework

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Introduction
At the core of the social disorganization perspective is the notion that neighborhood structural factors (i.e., socio-economic status, residential mobility, racial heterogeneity, family disruption, and urbanization) disrupt a community’s ability to self-regulate, which in turn leads to crime and delinquency.

Exogenous neighborhood characteristics believed to be causally linked to crime and delinquency are consistently derived from official Census data and endogenous community characteristics are typically measured from self-reported surveys.

The body of literature supporting the social disorganization explanation of criminogenic places is growing and supports the idea that neighborhood structural determinants of crime influence residents’ feelings of social capital and collective efficacy, which in turn explains variations in levels of neighborhood crime.

It is unclear, however, whether individuals’ feelings of life satisfaction and/or negative emotionality mediate this dynamic.

Aim
This project was designed to test two research hypotheses:

1. When considered within the context of a social disorganization framework, are measures of life satisfaction significantly related to neighborhood crime rates via endogenous community characteristics?

2. When considered within the context of a social disorganization framework, are measures of negative emotionality significantly related to neighborhood crime rates via endogenous community characteristics?

Methods
Self-administered surveys were used to collect data on life satisfaction and negative emotionality from a convenience sample of Clark County residents. Interviews were conducted during the Spring of 2011 (n=48).

Information that enabled researchers to identify the Census Block Group in which each respondent lived was also obtained.

Corresponding characteristics of neighborhoods were acquired from the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates file for data collected from 2006-10.

Crime data were provided by the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. The typical respondent was male (56%), 28 years of age, and who had reportedly lived in their current residence for about 7 years.

Results
Table 1 provides descriptive statistics of variables associated with neighborhood structural conditions, indicators of life satisfaction and negative emotionality, endogenous community factors, and crime rates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood structural determinant</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial heterogeneity</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential mobility</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Stability</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Endogenous individual factors

- Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS): 3.00 - 6.80, Mean = 5.33
- Negative emotionality (PSS): 0.22 - 2.78, Mean = 1.46

Endogenous community characteristics

- Local friendship networks: 0.40 - 3.20, Mean = 2.15
- Peer group affiliation: 0.00 - 4.00, Mean = 2.47
- Organizational participation: 0.00 - 2.00, Mean = 0.27

Outcome measure

- Violent crime rate (per 1,000): 0.00 - 637.21, Mean = 24.71

A second path model was run (not shown) and included measures of life satisfaction and negative emotionality. Table 2 shows the total indirect, direct, and total effects and zero-order correlations for these second model and suggests that the individual endogenous factors have little influence on mediating the relationship between exogenous neighborhood structural determinants, endogenous community characteristics, and violent crime.

Figure 1 presents a path model that excludes measures of life satisfaction and negative emotionality. Findings show socioeconomic status has a direct, inverse effect on violent crime, but is positively related to two endogenous community characteristics. Residential mobility has a direct, positive effect on violent crime. Family stability is positively related to organizational participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept/variables</th>
<th>Total indirect effect</th>
<th>Direct effect</th>
<th>Total effect</th>
<th>Zero-order correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood structural determinants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.645 **</td>
<td>-0.647 **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial heterogeneity</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>-0.103</td>
<td>0.140</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential mobility</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>-0.271 *</td>
<td>-0.281 *</td>
<td>-0.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Stability</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.151</td>
<td>0.159</td>
<td>0.362 **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Endogenous individual factors

- Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS): -0.035 -- 0.035, Mean = -0.181
- Negative emotionality (PSS): 0.057 -- 0.057, Mean = 0.217

Endogenous community characteristics

- Local friendship networks: 0.298 -- 0.288, Mean = 0.249 *
- Peer group affiliation: 0.251 -- 0.251, Mean = 0.279 **
- Organizational participation: 0.006 -- 0.006, Mean = 0.071

Table 2. Total indirect, direct, and total effects and zero-order correlations for variables predicting violent crime.

Conclusion
Results of our analysis lead us to important conclusions about our research questions:

Neither individual-level endogenous factor considered in the model demonstrated a meaningful indirect effect across any path to violent crime; and the total indirect effects of these variables were negligible.

Furthermore, path coefficients from analysis excluding individual endogenous factors were statistically similar to those in a model including these variables (analysis not shown).

Based on these findings, we conclude that neither life satisfaction or negative emotionality is related to neighborhood crime via endogenous community characteristics, when considered within the context of a social disorganization framework.

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