



## Socially disorganized yet safe: Understanding resilience to crime in neighborhoods in New Zealand



G.D. Breetzke<sup>a,\*</sup>, A.L. Pearson<sup>b,c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Geography, University of South Africa, Florida Campus (Johannesburg), Private Bag X6, 1710, South Africa

<sup>b</sup> Department of Public Health, University of Otago, Wellington, New Zealand

<sup>c</sup> Department of Geography, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, USA

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 6 July 2015

Received in revised form 18 September 2015

Accepted 19 September 2015

Available online 16 October 2015

#### Keywords:

Resilience

Crime

Built environment

Social environment

Neighborhood effect

### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Drawing on theories from environmental criminology, this article identifies neighborhood-level characteristics that promote resiliency in neighborhoods in New Zealand with disadvantageous socioeconomic settings. **Methods:** We used neighborhood-level crime (2008–2010) and socio-economic data to develop a Crime Resilience Index for New Zealand (CRINZ) to quantify neighborhood level resilience to crime across the country. We then examined relationships between the index and a suite of built and social neighborhood-level characteristics.

**Results:** Access to built environment factors generally decreased across neighborhoods stratified by resiliency. That is, resilient neighborhoods had decreased access to a range of healthcare, education, and living infrastructures. Very little difference was found in the social environment of high resilient and low resilient neighborhoods in New Zealand.

**Conclusions:** Understanding why communities respond differently in similar environments can enable communities to respond better or more effectively to such stressful environments and consequently build resilience. Identifying 'place-specific' resilience factors can be effective in reducing crime in neighborhoods.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### Introduction

Resilience is a relatively new concept in criminology. The term has its historical antecedents in hazards research, materials science and environmental studies before evolving over the past decade or so into a concept used most liberally and enthusiastically by a wide range of policy makers, practitioners and academic scholars. The concept is ubiquitous in both the physical (see Phillips, Rose, Mendoza, & Vargas, 2006; Stallard & Buck, 2013; Sundstrom, Allen, & Barichiev, 2012) and social sciences (see McAreavey, 2012; Pietrzak & Southwick, 2011) although the actual meaning associated with the term differs accordingly. In truth, there are a large and growing number of conceptual frameworks for 'resilience' that in part reflects its increasingly diverse use in scholarly literature but also, importantly, reflects its complex and multi-dimensional nature. Rogers (2013) identifies three key 'forms' of resilience: organizational, technological, and community. Organizational resilience refers to the ability of an organization to manage a disturbance or shock to its operating environment and to develop a new organizational pathway (Gilly, Kechidi, & Talbot, 2013). The notion here is that the organization is not only able to absorb and/or anticipate the mutation but is able to develop a new growth dynamic making it bigger

and better than before. Technological resilience is predicated on the ability of a physical system to perform to an acceptable and desirable level when subject to various external forces or internal malfunctions (Cairns, 2004). From a community perspective, resilience is a slightly more nebulous concept that has been defined as "the ability of communities to cope and adapt in the context of challenge and adversity in ways that promote the successful achievement of desired community results" (Mancini & Bowen, 2009, p. 248). A community is thought to reduce its vulnerability to adversity through information and knowledge sharing, the development of supportive networks, and the ability and willingness to adapt (McAslan, 2010). In this way, resilience is conceptualized as the opposite or a lack of vulnerability. A resilient community does not only overcome adversity and minimise vulnerability, but does so positively to advance the community through learning and adaptation.

Most previous scientific exploration of community resilience has focused on the coping capacities and recovery of communities in the aftermath of a natural hazard or disaster (see Adger, 2003; Crittenden, 2001; Morrow, 2008). This is understandable as communities experiencing such phenomena generally suffer acute and significant damage to their entire social, natural, and built environment systems. Much less consideration has been given to identifying what makes communities resilient to more long-term, chronic adverse outcomes such as crime-related behaviors. The current criminological discourse on resilience has predominantly focused on identifying psycho-social resiliency factors among

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: breetzgd@unisa.ac.za (G.D. Breetzke), apearson@msu.edu (A.L. Pearson).

individuals, rather than communities, for recovery from crime-related personal trauma or extreme life events. For example, Smith, Park, Ireland, Elwyn, and Thornberry (2013) investigated the role of educational experiences in promoting resilience to crime and violence in early adulthood while others have investigated resiliency factors among victims of child abuse (see duMont, Spatz-Widom, & Czaja, 2007), sexual assault (Bonanno, 2013; Steenkamp, Dickstein, Salters-Pedneault, Hofmann, & Litz, 2012), or witnesses to family violence (Gewitz & Edleson, 2004; Ward, Martin, Theron, & Distiller, 2007). In other contexts, Malm and Bichler (2011) investigated how resiliency between individuals involved in criminal enterprises makes illicit markets function more effectively, while Homel, Lincoln, and Herd (1999) outlined how various interrelated protective factors including cultural resilience could inhibit developmental pathways leading to crime and violence in Aboriginal communities in Australia.

To our knowledge, no criminological research has focused on what makes neighborhoods resilient to crime despite their disadvantageous settings. The moderating effect of various neighborhood-level factors such as collective efficacy (discussed later) and social cohesion on neighborhood crime has been considered but its impact on engendering neighborhood resilience to crime has not been explicitly investigated. In the health literature researchers have already identified what makes neighborhoods 'overachieve' in terms of better mental health, lower mortality or better life expectancy than estimated given the underlying socio-economics of the neighborhood (see Tunstall, Mitchell, Gibbs, Platt, & Dorling, 2007; Van Hooijonk, Droomers, van Loon, van der Lucht, & Kunst, 2007). A wide range of neighborhood-level characteristics in the built, physical and social environments in New Zealand have been identified that have been shown to bolster health in neighborhoods despite high levels of deprivation, for example (see Pearson, Pearce, & Kingham, 2013).

In this study we examine the apparent paradox of low crime despite high risk in neighborhoods throughout New Zealand. Previous work in environmental criminology has largely focused on identifying neighborhood-level risk factors in the social and built environment that leads to an increase in opportunities for crime. In contrast we identify neighborhood-level characteristics that make communities more resilient to criminal behavior despite their theoretically disadvantageous settings. We begin by highlighting a number of environmental criminological theories that could be used to better understand what drives resilience among communities. We then detail the construction of a novel crime resilience index for New Zealand (CRINZ) that quantifies levels of resilience in each neighborhood throughout the country. Then, we use the CRINZ to examine relationships with neighborhood characteristics of the built and social environments in an attempt to understand what makes certain neighborhoods 'overachieve' in terms of low crime rates, in the face of various neighborhood-level crime risk factors.

### Theoretical perspective

A number of theories in criminology place great importance on the role of the neighborhood in affecting individual criminality. Chief among these theories is the social disorganization theory of Shaw and McKay (1942). According to this well-known theoretical perspective neighborhoods with high levels of economic deprivation, racial heterogeneity, residential mobility, and family disruption experience more crime and disorder than other neighborhoods. Later Sampson and Groves (1989) suggested that these community-level structural factors are mediated by informal social control; loosely defined as the willingness of neighborhood residents to intervene in local problems (Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). One way of increasing informal social control in neighborhoods, particularly among the youth, is by stimulating collective efficacy. Residents in neighborhoods characterized by high levels of collective efficacy are able to orientate themselves towards achieving a certain shared objective and are willing to intervene on behalf of the

common good (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Importantly, neighborhoods with high levels of collective efficacy have generally been found to have lower overall levels of violent and sexual crime (Mazerolle, Wickes, & McBroom, 2010; Mustaine, Tewksbury, Huff-Corzine, Corzine, & Marshall, 2014; Sampson et al., 1997). The main themes of social disorganization theory have been exhaustively tested using a range of statistical methods (Allen & Cancino, 2012; Porter & Purser, 2010), at a range of spatial scales (Pizarro & McGloin, 2006; Weisburd, Morris, & Groff, 2009) and in a diverse set of geographic contexts (Andresen, 2006; Breetzke, 2010; Jiang, Wang, & Lambert, 2010; Jobs, Barclay, Weinand, & Donnermeyer, 2004). In most instances, the main tenets of the theory are supported although nagging methodological issues (Andresen, 2010; Braga & Clarke, 2014) and theoretical challenges (Bursik, 1988; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003) remain.

Other opportunity theories of crime such as routine activity (Cohen & Felson, 1979), rational choice (Cornish & Clarke, 1986), and crime pattern theory (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1991), have also been used to understand the clustering of criminal events. A number of concepts derived from these theories are useful in explaining the persistence of crime in some neighborhoods. These include the crime pattern theory concepts of 'crime facilitators' (such as markets and shopping malls) and 'crime attractors' (such as alcohol outlets, convenience stores, and major street intersections) that attract a large number of people, including potential offenders (see Brantingham & Brantingham, 1995). Neighborhoods with a high number of these features will disproportionately attract those with criminal intent, leading to an increase in opportunities for crime (Braga & Clarke, 2014). Another important concept derived from the rational choice perspective is that of 'risky facilities' (Eck, Clarke, & Guerette, 2007). Previous work has found the presence of risky facilities to be associated with increased risk of neighborhood crime (Felson, 1987; Roncek, 1981).

The focus of much of these theoretical frameworks in environmental criminology lies on identifying which neighborhood-level variables make certain places more prone to crime. The theories attempt to provide answers for questions such as: how can we explain the high concentration of crime in this particular location (city, neighborhood, or street segment)? What is it about the social and/or built environment in this location that creates favorable opportunities for criminal behavior? Identifying crime 'hot spots' (Sherman, Gartin, & Buerger, 1989; Weisburd et al., 2009), generators and attractors (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1995), or risky facilitators (Eck et al., 2007) form much of the foundation around which these theories operate and are operationalized in the literature. The notion being that if law enforcement agencies are aware of where and why crime is concentrated in a particular location, then resources can be suitably directed to that location resulting in the greatest preventative benefits. While this focus is justifiable and important, we argue that theorizing on what is 'bad' or socially disorganized about a neighborhood (or community) can lead to a social problems mind-set that limits the opportunities crime researchers have for building capacity and resilience in disadvantaged neighborhoods. It is just as important, if not more so to determine which features of an environment can explain the lack of crime in a location. By lack of crime we do not necessarily mean a crime cold spot per se but rather the identification of areas that theoretically *should* have higher rates of crime given the underlying characteristics yet have unexpectedly low rates. We argue that more attention needs to be paid to what makes certain disadvantaged neighborhoods resilient to crime. If a neighborhood appears to be socially disorganized and/or has a high number of crime attractors/generators/facilitators yet still falls 'below the crime curve', what can explain this?

We are aware of only a handful of criminological studies that include the concept of resilience. Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) for example used the notion of collective efficacy to explain why some neighborhoods in Chicago become high-crime areas, but others do not, despite the fact that they appeared to be similar based on a number of key socio-economic variables. While not investigating resilience necessarily,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/882633>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/882633>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)