



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Social Science Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ssresearch

Teasing out the effects of macro-conditions on race-specific male homicide rates: Do distinct predictors vary by racial group and over time?

Richard Stansfield*, Karen F. Parker

Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, 325 Smith Hall, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 August 2012

Revised 20 December 2012

Accepted 23 December 2012

Available online 3 January 2013

Keywords:

Disadvantage

Race

Homicide

ABSTRACT

Researchers tend to capture the multiple disadvantages facing urban areas by using an all-encompassing disadvantage index, which combines poverty, joblessness and other economic predictors into a single index. While the use of this index is important for conceptual and methodological reasons, questions remain about whether these city characteristics differ in magnitude and significance when influencing race-specific homicide rates and whether or not these effects exhibit stability or vary over time? This article examines how discrete measures of disadvantage differ in their importance for race-specific groups over three critical time points: 1980, 1990, and 2000. After accounting for problems associated with statistical inferences, cross sectional, Seemingly Unrelated Regression (SUR) analyses reveal that family disruption and poverty status were among the strongest predictors of race-specific homicide rates. Wald tests for the equality of coefficients confirmed significant differences in the influence of many discrete measures of disadvantage for white and black males, but the number of differences declined from 1980 and into the 2000s. That is, along with the crime drop, our research reveals increasing racial parity in structural predictors over time.

© 2012 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In the classic social disorganization tradition (Shaw and McKay, 1931, 1942), crime and delinquency are predicted in areas characterized by persistent poverty, rapid population growth, heterogeneity and residential mobility which combine to disturb the capacity of core social institutions to foster neighborhood informal social control. Recent applications of the theory also provide evidence of the ability of disorganization measures to explain variation in violence across racial groups (Bursik, 1988; Kubrin and Weitzer, 2003; Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley, 2002). Yet inside city boundaries, many have argued that poverty, joblessness and family disruption contribute to structural social disorganization and crime directly (Blau and Blau, 1982; Hannon and Defronzo, 1998; Rankin and Quane, 2002; Wilson, 1987, 1996). While the removal of manufacturing jobs affected unemployment or jobless rates, preexisting segregation in labor markets through discrimination in hiring, meant the ill effects of deindustrialization were predominantly felt among minorities and the poor (Parker, 2008). With these arguments in mind, much recent research in the field has incorporated a composite measure of urban disadvantage to reflect how structural processes contribute to crime rates, as communities are transformed largely into service-based economies.

* Corresponding author. Address: Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, University of Delaware, 325 Smith Hall, Newark, DE 19716, United States.
E-mail address: rstans@udel.edu (R. Stansfield).

In their landmark study assessing covariates of homicide rates, Land et al. (1990) examined the use of structural indicators to predict homicide in 30 years of criminology literature, showing incredible inconsistency in the empirical support of these various measures. While highlighting a number of important reasons for this inconsistency, perhaps their greatest contribution was to highlight the issues of multicollinearity, and related, yet separate, issue of the partialing fallacy (Gordon, 1968) among structural covariates of homicide rates. Land and colleagues then recommended the use of principal components factor analysis to ascertain, and remedy, issues of collinearity among variables. This procedure has now become so widely used by researchers examining structural forces, that many now reference this as conventional practice, without citing Land et al. (McCall, Land and Parker, 2010).

While there are clear methodological reasons for the use of principal components factor analysis, one drawback of this approach is that we lose the ability to assess each indicator's unique influence on crime, and for different groups or points in time (Kubrin and Weitzer, 2003; Sampson et al., 2002; Steffensmeier et al., 2010). Conceptually, characteristics such as poverty and inequality are very different, yet modeling structural predictors of crime over time with a disadvantage index means we are unable to assess whether one predictor is more important than the other at any given point in time (Parker, 2008). To address this issue, the present study examines the importance of economic, social and labor market conditions on homicide over three time points: 1980, 1990, and 2000. While recent studies have attended to some of these issues at one point in time (Steffensmeier et al., 2010), we extend this previous work by: examining a city level unit of analysis; estimating the impact of multiple discrete measures of disadvantage and labor market forces; including different points in time; and focusing on males of race-specific groups.

Examining how disadvantage works by type of disadvantage, and more importantly, between non-Hispanic white and black groups, is an important conceptual issue masked in the current research on disadvantage and crime (exceptions include Phillips, 2002). And separate literatures documenting changes in assimilation and changes in racial inequality would lead us to expect that black and white variation in predictors would have also changed over time too. Since Wilson's (1987) much debated work positing an increased role of class in determining the life-chances of African Americans, blacks have seen unprecedented occupational mobility (Landry and Marsh, 2011) and entry into middle-class and professional positions largely determined by increases in educational attainment (Yamaguchi, 2009). Professional mobility has also occurred beside increased entry into integrated communities (Logan and Zhang, 2010), which has been shown to be associated with smaller differences between black and white homicide rates (Velez et al., 2003). In a recent city level analysis of black and white arrest rates since 1960, LaFree et al. (2010) find little support for the hypothesis that increased racial integration has led to a convergence of black and white homicide arrests. Importantly however, they do find substantial convergence over time in cities that have had the greatest reductions in the ratio of black to white single-parent families, and the greatest increases in the proportion of the population that is black.

These results further highlight the importance of examining discrete measures of disadvantage over time. While many studies have not done so, we formally test for differences in the significance and magnitude of key macro-level conditions on homicide rates for white males and black males (exceptions include Lauritsen and Heimer, 2010; Parker, 2008). Given evidence of shifts in labor market conditions, declining levels of racial residential segregation in many US cities, and changes in crime rates (e.g., the crime drop of the 1990s), whether these predictors exhibit stability or vary in their effects on homicide rates remains unsettled. Key to this current study, then, is our arguments for why measures of disadvantage should be deconstructed for the purpose of this investigation.

2. Deconstruction of the multiple forms of disadvantage

Using principal components analyses and composite indexes to capture the effects of disadvantage in urban research, while also avoiding methodological issues like multicollinearity, has been well discussed and defended in existing literature (Land et al., 1990; McCall et al., 2010). This practice and its use in much of the criminological research is not an issue. At the same time however, the use of such techniques means that one can no longer estimate the unique contribution of each construct in the race-specific homicide equation (Kubrin and Weitzer, 2003; Parker, 2008; Steffensmeier et al., 2010). This is important given that, in many race-specific studies of homicide, inconsistencies appear in how these indicators influence homicide, particularly in the case of black homicides. In a careful review of 28 studies examining race-specific homicide rates, Parker (2008) identified the relative instability in the significance of poverty, income inequality and unemployment. For example, four studies using 1990 data found poverty was a statistically significant predictor of black homicide rates and eight where it was not. Meanwhile, poverty was statistically significant in all studies of white homicide rates. Similarly, examining eleven city-level studies that utilized a measure of income inequality, five revealed a significant association with black homicides, and six revealed no significant relationship. While methodological decisions were likely responsible for much of the inconsistencies in these works, we argue that it is both timely and important to systematically investigate whether key macro-level conditions are uniquely contributing to the differences in race-specific homicide rates over time.

In addition to employing methodological techniques to assess the unique contributions in both significance and magnitude of multiple forms of disadvantage on race-specific homicide rates over time, our study is guided by three central themes or explanations for why urban disadvantage is related to homicide rates, and also why we should expect racial differences in the level of disadvantage and violence found within cities. They include: (1) labor market segmentation and the shift away

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10474093>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10474093>

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