



Lack of community-oriented policing practices partially mediates the relationship between racial residential segregation and “black-on-black” homicide rates

Aaron J. Diehr*, Justin T. McDaniel

Southern Illinois University, Department of Public Health & Recreation Professions, 475 Clocktower Drive, MC 4632, Carbondale, IL 62901, United States



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ABSTRACT

Although black-white racial residential segregation in the US has continued to decline, blacks still experience greater levels of segregation than other racial groups. The present study examined whether a lack of community policing practices in 2012 mediated the relationship between racial segregation in 2010 and intraracial (i.e., “black-on-black”) homicides in 2013. We collected incorporated-place-level secondary data from several sources and performed mediation analysis to test relationships among variables. Consistent with previous research, higher levels of segregation were associated with higher intraracial homicide rates; however, the effect was mediated by lack of community policing efforts. Specifically, our findings suggest that lack of community policing practices might explain 13% of the relationship between black-white residential segregation and intraracial homicide.

Given the history and complexity of racial residential segregation in the US, one immediate measure by which policymakers might improve health in segregated places is the implementation and expansion of community policing initiatives.

1. Introduction

Segregation is associated with myriad deleterious outcomes, including social isolation, obesity, cardiovascular disease, infant mortality, and violent crime (Barber et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2009; LaVeist, 1993; Massey & Denton, 1993). Studies have examined associations between segregation and black crime, finding positive associations for robbery, assault, homicide, and property crime (Akins, 2003; Logan & Messner, 1987; Rosenfeld, 1986; Shihadeh & Flynn, 1996). Increased violence in segregated communities might result from greater concentrated disadvantage (Peterson & Krivo, 1999). Akins (Akins, 2009) found, in Columbus, Ohio, segregation was positively associated with aggravated assault but that economic disadvantage was the primary mechanism by which segregation produced crime, a finding consistent with previously suggested hypotheses (Peterson & Krivo, 1993; LaVeist, 1993). Additionally, Krivo and Peterson (Krivo & Peterson, 2000) examined 124 cities with populations over 100,000 and found that if, hypothetically, blacks and whites had similar levels of concentrated neighborhood disadvantage, structural predictors of crime would not differ significantly. Using a resource deprivation/segregation index, Parker and McCall (Parker & McCall, 1999) discovered resource

deprivation and segregation also had a positive effect on intraracial homicide. Yet, these same factors did not contribute to rates of inter-racial (i.e., “black-on-white” or “white-on-black”) homicide.

Individuals in segregated neighborhoods often find themselves stuck in what Sampson and Morenoff (Sampson & Morenoff, 2016) refer to as “poverty traps,” urban neighborhoods constrained by stigmatizing structural dynamics resulting in worsening poverty. Segregated black communities have greater risks but fewer resources and protective factors than other neighborhoods (Sampson & Bean, 2006). Lee and Ousey (Lee & Ousey, 2005) discovered greater access to institutions like churches and civic organizations were associated with fewer black homicides, after controlling for disadvantage and racial inequality. Another factor that might mediate the relationship between residential segregation and violent crime is the method of policing used within these communities.

The traditional reactive “standard model” of policing has provided little evidence of success throughout the years (National Research Council, 2004). Furthermore, it acts as a constraining factor on individuals. Heavy police presence in impoverished, high crime areas imposes interaction costs deterring residents from moving about freely, thereby implicitly reinforcing segregation among neighborhoods (Huq,

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: aaron@siu.edu (A.J. Diehr), jtmcd@siu.edu (J.T. McDaniel).

2017). However, “focused models” of policing—including problem-oriented policing, community-oriented policing, and proactive attention to crime “hot spots”—have each shown greater promise, with hot-spots policing providing the strongest evidence for police effectiveness in reducing crime and disorder (National Research Council, 2004; Weisburd & Eck, 2004). The use of focused approaches can provide evidence of successful policing techniques, allowing for departments to eliminate less-successful techniques and maximize use of effective approaches (Lum & Koper, 2015).

Community-oriented-policing requires changing processes of decision-making and reinventing the culture rather than simply following a specific set of activities (Skogan, 2006). Its success depends on three specific components: (1) administrative decentralization, through which midlevel district commanders (not police chiefs) identify and respond to issues relevant to their specific districts; (2) community engagement, in which police and community members interact regularly; and (3) problem solving, whereby police adopt a crime-prevention model instead of a crime-response model (Skogan, 2006). Given that citizens often identify neighborhood concerns that fall outside the jurisdiction of police (such as, for examples, blight removal or housing conditions), police must form partnerships with other public services, such as housing authorities or health departments, to solve problems effectively.

Since the peak of community-oriented policing in the 1990s, however, there has been a drop-off in departments employing full-time community-policing officers. Gill and colleagues (Gill et al., 2014) suggest while economic downturn might partly be to blame, it is likely that inherent difficulties in implementing community-policing initiatives also played a role in the reduction. Reasons initiatives fail include police resistance, added demands, and inability to form collaborations with other public service agencies (Skogan, 2005). Additionally, issues of police misconduct erode police-community trust, thereby putting the (already slow-moving) process back at “square one.” (Skogan, 2005)

Indeed, literature on community-policing effectiveness has been mixed. Some recent programs have shown success in reducing violent crime. A 2013 agency-wide overhaul in Camden NJ resulted in violent crime being reduced in 2015 by 24% and homicides by 47% (Gallagher et al., 2016). Yet historically, most community-policing efforts have tended only to produce short-term positive outcomes (e.g., resident satisfaction, improved trust in police); overall, the approach has had limited effects on crime (Weisburd & Eck, 2004). Skogan (Skogan, 2008) has suggested community-policing has often been unsuccessful when it lacks problem solving approaches, and Gill and colleagues (Gill et al., 2014) have called for the use of logic models to better elucidate how shorter-term effects of community-policing might lead to long-term reductions in crime. It is necessary also to gather specific details regarding implementation of community-policing initiatives to ensure all necessary components are given due attention (Skogan, 2006; Skogan, 2008).

The success of community-policing not only depends on the comprehensiveness of the initiative, but also on public perceptions of police, which, in turn, influences people's willingness to collaborate (Skogan, 2006). Minority communities have reacted positively to community-policing initiatives, particularly when they personally know their police officers (Wehrman & De Angelis, 2011). Given what is known about the relationship between social isolation and intraracial homicide (Parker & McCall, 1999), and understanding the difficulty in reducing the structural barriers that facilitate segregation, it is feasible that the lack of comprehensive community-policing practices might be associated with increased homicide rates, specifically “black-on-black” homicide. Work by Akins (Akins, 2003) showed greater police presence exists disproportionately in areas with higher rates of crimes and those with segregated minority populations, thus suggesting increased segregation itself leads to greater police presence. The results of this same study showed partial mediation of the relationship between segregation

and property crime through increased police presence. Accordingly, the purpose of the present study was to examine further the effect of segregation on intraracial black homicide rates (IBHR) and to explore whether lack of community-policing (LCP) practices—measured by a weighted summative index measuring community-policing comprehensiveness—mediates the relationship between those two variables.

2. Methods

2.1. Data collection

This ecological study (Friis, 2009) utilized the following unit of analysis: “incorporated places” in the United States (U.S.), which included cities, towns, villages, or boroughs (United States Census Bureau [Internet], n.d.). Secondary data were downloaded from several sources. The following control variables were retrieved from the 2010 U.S. Census at the incorporated-place-level: (United States Census Bureau [Internet], 2010) (1) percentage of the black population with less than a high-school education [EDUC], (2) percentage of the total population of black race [BPOP], (3) per-capita income for the black population within the last year [INC], (4) location within the southern region of the U.S. [SOUTH], and (5) urbanization, which necessitated a minimum population of 50,000 [URBAN]. Geographic location [SOUTH] and overall population size [URBAN] were selected as controls, following Parker and McCall's (Parker & McCall, 1999) procedures.

Roberto's (Roberto, 2016) method for calculating the Divergence Index (D) was used to determine white-black residential segregation. Unlike other measures of segregation, such as the Dissimilarity Index (Jahn et al., 1947) or the Information Theory Index (White, 1986), D is decomposable and does not merely measure relative diversity. Instead, D measures “relative entropy, an information theoretic measure of the difference between two probability distributions,” (p. 7) (Roberto, 2016) where one distribution captures the proportion of each racial group in an area overall (i.e., incorporated-place) and another distribution captures the proportion of each racial group within smaller sub-units of the larger area (i.e., Census block-group). Data for D were retrieved from the 2010 decennial U.S. Census at the “block-group” level and aggregated to the incorporated-place-level. Block-groups are divisions within Census-tracts, and information regarding their population characteristics are only released with each decennial Census (United States Census Bureau [Internet], n.d.). Only “incorporated-places” with a black population equal to at least 2% of the total place population were included in the analysis, as in Parker and McCall (Parker & McCall, 1999). Each incorporated place in the present study was assigned a single Divergence Index (D), which was normalized with values ranging from 0 to 100.

To determine incorporated-place community-oriented policing practices through the 2012 calendar year, data from the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey—representing state/local agencies in all 50 states—were downloaded (Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research [Internet], n.d.) on 3272 police agencies, 2059 of which were local agencies. Five variables from LEMAS were used to calculate a weighted summative index—ranging from 0 to 100—of LCP at local agencies, the procedures for which were based on the writings of Wells and Falcone: (Wells & Falcone, 2006) E1, whether a jurisdiction had a written community-policing plan; E2B, whether in-service officers received 8-hours of community-policing training; E4, number of officers engaged in Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment (SARA) problem solving projects (note: this variable was computed as the number of officers per 100,000 of each incorporated place's black population and log transformed prior to summation); E6, whether problem-solving partnerships were evident between local police and civic/business organizations; E9, whether police agencies utilized information from the Survey of Local Residents. The aforementioned index was computed for

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