Families, neighborhoods, and juvenile victimization.

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Pittsburgh Youth Study

This is a brief report based on analyses using data from the Pittsburgh Youth Study (Loeber et al., 2003) and addressing the question raised by Mr. Bill Woodruff whether we could replicate Janet L. Lauritsen's (2003) finding on the association between family composition, community of residence, and youth violent victimization. Specifically, drawing on the National Crime Victimization Survey, she found that 'children in single-parent families are at higher risk for victimization than children in two-parent families' (2003, p. 10). In the same publication, she mentioned that the impact of family disruption on victimization could be best studied in prospective longitudinal data sets. This report explores this issue in data from the Pittsburgh Youth Study (PYS).

METHOD

Analyses were conducted using juveniles' report on criminal victimization at phase G in the youngest and oldest samples (average ages 9.7 and 16.0, respectively), which was the first time that victimization was measured in the PYS. Note that victimization questions asked about the past 6 months in the youngest sample and the past 12 months for the oldest sample.

Victimization was scored in three ways: (a) Theft Victimization; (b) Violent Victimization; and (c) Total Crime Victimization. *Theft Victimization* is a dichotomous variable indicating whether the youth reported having anything stolen from them during the assessment period. *Violence Victimization* is a dichotomous variable indicating whether the youth reported being the victim of strongarm tactics or intentional injury during the assessment period. *Total Criminal Victimization* is the dichotomous variable that was positive if the youth reported Theft or Violence Victimization.

Socio-Economic Status of Neighborhood (SES Neighborhood). Neighborhoods were classified on the basis of 1990 census information in which 88 Pittsburgh neighborhoods received a score on the following variables: percent families with children headed by single parents, median household income, percent families below the poverty level, percent households on public assistance, percent unemployed, and percent African American (Wikström & Loeber, 2000). A continuous score dichotomized at the lower 25% to represent low socioeconomic neighborhoods (called Low SES neighborhood). This lower quartile also contained young men living in public housing. Each boy was matched with a neighborhood type (low SES neighborhood vs Non-low SES neighborhood) on the basis of his address during the first follow-up assessment in 1987-88. The advantage of the low SES neighborhood score is that is independent from data collected from the participants in the PYS study.

Single Parent Family Structure. This construct categorizes the youth's living situation according to the relationship of his primary caretaker, his/her partner, and any other adults in the home, using data from the Demographic questionnaire completed by primary caretaker at phase G in the youngest and oldest samples (average ages 9.7 and 16.0, respectively). The current study classified children as either having two biological parents in the home, or one/no biological parents in the home.

RESULTS

Tables 1-3 present the results for youngest sample, while Tables 4-6 present the results for the oldest sample. Analyses were done by means of chi-square with a p-value of .05 being the maximum value for results to reach statistical significance. Based on the Lauritsen (2003) analyses, we expected that criminal victimization would be highest for young men from single parent household in the low SES neighborhoods. This hypothesis, however, was not supported

by the data. In none of three analyses (total criminal victimization, theft victimization, and violence victimization) for each of the youngest and oldest samples was there a statistically significant result. In other words, victimization measured in three different ways was not significantly higher in young men from single parent households in low SES neighborhoods compared to two-parent households in low SES neighborhoods, or significantly different between young men from one- or two-parent families living in non-low SES neighborhoods. For example, Table 1 shows that in the youngest sample, 24.6% of the young men from families with one/no biological parents were criminally victimized, compared to 26.3% of the young men from families with two biological parents. Similarly, all other comparison failed to reach statistical significance.

Limitations. There are several limitations to the analyses. First, family status (single parent vs. two parent household) was a static factor in these analyses. Because of limitations in the number of waves that victimization was measured, we could not address whether recency of family break-up was associated with heightened risk of later victimization of young men. In addition, the analyses addressed the prevalence rather than the frequency of victimization, because we expected that more young men from single-parent families in the low SES neighborhoods would be victimized than in the non-low SES neighborhoods. This was obviously not the case.

References

Lauritsen, J. L. (2003), Violent victimization among youth: Individual, family, and community factors. OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin.

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Table 1
Relation between neighborhood SES, family structure and criminal victimization in the youngest cohort

	Family Structure				
	One/No Biological Parents		Two Biological Parents		
	N	%	*N*	%	χ^2
Non-Low SES Neighborhood					
Crime Victim					
No	104	68.9%	100	76.9%	
Yes	47	31.1%	30	23.1%	
Total	151	100.0%	130	100.0%	2.28
Low SES Neighborhood					
Crime Victim					
No	101	75.4%	14	73.7%	
Yes	33	24.6%	5	26.3%	
Total	134	100.0%	19	100.0%	0.03

All χ^2 not significant.

Table 2
Relation between neighborhood SES, family structure and theft victimization in the youngest cohort

	Family Structure				
	One/No Biological Parents		Two Biological Parents		
	N	%	*N*	%	χ^2
Non-Low SES Neighborhood					
Crime Victim					
No	114	75.5%	107	82.3%	
Yes	37	24.5%	23	17.7%	
Total	151	100.0%	130	100.0%	1.93
Low SES Neighborhood					
Crime Victim					
No	110	82.1%	15	78.9%	
Yes	24	17.9%	4	21.1%	
Total	134	100.0%	19	100.0%	0.11

All χ^2 not significant.

Table 3
Relation between neighborhood SES, family structure and violent victimization in the youngest cohort

	Family Structure				
	One/No Biological Parents		Two Biological Parents		
	N	%	*N*	%	χ^2
Non-Low SES Neighborhood					
Crime Victim					
No	140	91.5%	121	93.1%	
Yes	13	8.5%	9	6.9%	
Total	153	100.0%	130	100.0%	0.24
Low SES Neighborhood					
Crime Victim					
No	121	90.3%	17	89.5%	
Yes	13	9.7%	2	10.5%	
Total	134	100.0%	19	100.0%	0.01

All χ^2 not significant.

Table 4
Relation between neighborhood SES, family structure and criminal victimization in the oldest cohort

	Family Structure				
	One/No Biological Parents		Two Biological Parents		
	N	%	*N*	%	χ^2
Non-Low SES Neighborhood					
Crime Victim					
No	99	55.0%	70	61.9%	
Yes	81	45.0%	43	38.1%	
Total	180	100.0%	113	100.0%	1.37
Low SES Neighborhood					
Crime Victim					
No	55	52.9%	10	55.6%	
Yes	49	47.1%	8	44.4%	
Total	104	100.0%	18	100.0%	0.04

All χ^2 not significant.

Table 5
Relation between neighborhood SES, family structure and theft victimization in the oldest cohort

	Family Structure				
	One/No Biological Parents		Two Biological Parents		
	N	%	*N*	%	χ^2
Non-Low SES Neighborhood					
Crime Victim					
No	119	66.1%	77	68.1%	
Yes	61	33.9%	36	31.9%	
Total	180	100.0%	113	100.0%	0.13
Low SES Neighborhood					
Crime Victim					
No	67	64.4%	11	61.1%	
Yes	37	35.6%	7	38.9%	
Total	104	100.0%	18	100.0%	0.07

All χ^2 not significant.

Table 6
Relation between neighborhood SES, family structure and violent victimization in the oldest cohort

	Family Structure				
	One/No Biological Parents		Two Biological Parents		
	N	%	*N*	%	χ^2
Non-Low SES Neighborhood					
Crime Victim					
No	149	82.8%	100	88.5%	
Yes	31	17.2%	13	11.5%	
Total	180	100.0%	113	100.0%	1.78
Low SES Neighborhood					
Crime Victim					
No	85	81.7%	17	94.4%	
Yes	19	18.3%	1	5.6%	
Total	104	100.0%	18	100.0%	1.80

All χ^2 not significant.