

Using Existing Statistics to Test Social Disorganization Theory

Data Analysis Module for Criminology

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This module is used in an online Criminology Course. The students have read their textbook discussing social disorganization theory and in this data analysis exercise will have the opportunity to test this theory with data obtained from the Census Bureau.

Learning Objectives:

Skill

- To be able to read and understand the information presented in tabular format.
- Using software to access and analyze census data
- Identifying independent and dependent variables
- Forming testable hypotheses using quantitative data
- Learning how to construct, read, and interpret bivariate tables displaying frequencies and percentages
- Using real world data to enhance and support key course concepts

Substance

- To be able to assemble data from multiple tables and use to make a conclusion about the level of support for social disorganization theory.

Background

To understand both social disorganization theory and Merton's Anomie/Strain theory, it is necessary to understand the concept of Anomie first coined by Emile Durkheim in his book, *The Division of Labor*.

According to Durkheim, human nature must be regulated by the collective order - society. How human nature is regulated depends on the type of society in which it takes place. Durkheim identified two different stages in societal development, one which was characterized by what he called Mechanical Solidarity and one which was characterized by Organic Solidarity.

In societies characterized by Mechanical Solidarity members are very much alike, they do the same kind of work, fulfill the same social roles, and have the same world view. In addition, they also have the same understanding of right and wrong. It is this collective conscience that binds people together and as a result promotes conformity.

In contrast, societies characterized by Organic Solidarity, typically more advanced societies, are more diversified in terms of work, social roles, and world views held by individuals. In these societies, the collective conscience is replaced by the division of labor.

Although all societies move in the general direction of organic solidarity, if this transition occurs too rapidly, a state of normlessness or Anomie, occurs. Rapid social change means that there has been no time to develop new social regulations to govern social interaction. At the same time, due to these changes, the old rules no longer apply

Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory was first developed in the studies of urban crime and delinquency by sociologists at Chicago in the 1920's and 30's. The idea behind the relationship between social disorganization and crime was that social order, stability, and integration were viewed as conducive to conformity, while disorder and a lack of integration were viewed as conducive to crime and deviance.

Drawing from Durkheim's ideas of anomie, the Chicago School theorists, argued that places characterized by a lack of social cohesion, integration, or solidarity (i.e. places that were highly disorganized) would have higher rates of crime and deviance. Note that the focus of the Chicago School is on the place rather than the individual.

In particular, social disorganization theory argues that neighborhood characteristics, particularly those that are indicative of anomie, are associated with crime rates.

Clifford Shaw and Henry Mckay (1969) took these ideas and examined the geographic distribution of rates of juvenile delinquency in the city of Chicago using the Chicago school perspective. They identified areas in Chicago with the highest crime rates and began to look at the characteristics of these areas.

Data Analysis Exercise

In this assignment we will be using existing statistics to test social disorganization theory. Existing statistics are pieces of information that are created for some other purpose than that of the research conducted. For example, a decennial Census is conducted every 10 years to count the number of people who are living in the United States and to provide some characteristics of these people. The purpose of the Census is to describe the U.S. population; however, the data that are collected can be used for other purposes as well.

In this module you will need to go to the census web page (www.census.gov). Once you are at this page, go to the bottom section titled

Special Topics. There you will see a link for **Statistical Abstract**. On the next page click on the link for view online versions of the most recent edition.

To complete this data analysis exercise you will need to use the following tables in the following sections.

- Law enforcement, Courts, and Prisons
- Births, Deaths, Marriages and Divorces
- Income, expenditures, and Wealth
- Social Insurance and Human Services

You will need information from these tables to complete the data analysis quiz in this module.

Quiz

Students complete the data analysis exercise by filling out an online quiz. Listed below are the questions on this quiz.

1. Which three states have the highest total crime rate?
2. What is the divorce rate for each of the three states with the highest crime rate?
3. What is the average monthly number of persons participating in the federal food stamp program for each of the three states with the highest crime rates?
4. What is the percent of families living below poverty for each of the three states with the highest crime rates?
5. What three states have the lowest total crime rate.
6. What is the divorce rate for each of the three states with the lowest crime rates?
7. What is the average monthly number of persons participating in the federal food stamp program for each of the three states with the lowest crime rates?
8. What is the percent of families living below poverty for each of the three states with the lowest crime rates?
9. If we use the divorce rate as an indicator of social disorganization, we would hypothesize that states with higher divorce rates would have _____ crime rates?
 - a. Equal
 - b. Higher
 - c. Lower
10. If we use the average number of participants in the federal food stamp program as an indicator of a subculture of poverty and perhaps as an indicator of social disorganization, we would hypothesize that states with a greater average number of food stamp participants would have _____ rates of crime.
 - a. Equal
 - b. Lower
 - c. Higher

11. If we consider the percent of families living below the poverty line as an indicator of both a subculture of poverty and social disorganization, we would hypothesize that states in which a _____ percentage of families lived below poverty would have lower crime rates?
 - a. Equal
 - b. Larger
 - c. Smaller
12. How do the states with higher crime rates compare with the states with lower crime rates in terms of the divorce rate?
 - a. The divorce rate for high crime states is equal to that for low crime states
 - b. The divorce rate for high crime states is lower than that for low crime states
 - c. This cannot be determined from the available data
 - d. The divorce rate in high crime states is slightly higher than for low crime states
13. How do the high crime states compare with the low crime states in terms of the percent of families living below the poverty level?
 - a. States with high crime rates have fewer families living in poverty
 - b. There is no difference between states with high crime and low crime rates
 - c. States with low crime rates appear to have fewer families living in poverty
 - d. The answer cannot be determined with these data
14. How do the high crime and low crime states compare in terms of the number of federal food stamp participants?
 - a. States with high crime rates have the same number of food stamp participants as states with low crime rates
 - b. States with high crime rates have fewer federal food stamp participants
 - c. States with high crime rates have more federal food stamp participants
 - d. The answer cannot be determined with these data
15. Were our hypotheses supported by the data analyses?
 - a. Yes – states with higher crime rates also had higher divorce rates, a greater number of food stamp participants, and more families living below the poverty level
 - b. No – there were no consistent patterns observed