Richard Rosenfeld, Mark Edberg Xiangiming Fang and Curtis S. Florence (Eds.): Economics and Youth Violence: Crime, Disadvantage, and Community

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In *Economics and Youth Violence: Crime, Disadvantage, and Community*, a panel of experts with backgrounds in youth crime and violence from different social science and public health related conducted a literature review and original research compiled by editors Richard Rosenfeld, Mark Edberg, Xiangming Fang, and Curtis S. Florence. The panel was called upon by the CDC, in light of the 2008 recession, to develop plans for future research in the area of economic factors relating to youth violence and to create strategies for prevention and intervention. The review of past literature on the subject as well as the addition of new research findings on the various pathways and moderating factors at play between macroeconomic factors and youth violence brings readers up to speed in the most effortless way possible. The complexities inherent in attempting to study such a multi-faceted phenomenon necessitated a narrowing of focus. Thus, the panel's efforts were centered on four subdomains that display the manifestations of the effect that economic conditions have on youth violence: families, schools, community resources, and street markets. The well-organized work detailed a variety of studies that asked many relevant questions and managed to hold these core subdomains at its center.

In the introductory chapter, the editors described both how the volume came into being and its organization. The editors laid out their analytical framework, which they built upon the Brooks-Gunn model, and the domains they chose to focus on. Throughout the literature review, they found that the majority of research on the connection between economic factors and youth violence are cross-sectional,

and that the results of the cross-sectional studies are often different from longitudinal studies. A suggested correction for this problem is for future research to divide its focus between cross-sectional and longitudinal methods. It was also found that most of the literature reviewed in the volume did not meet the goals of the analytical framework in examining the full pathways among economic factors, the mediating domains, and youth violence. Instead, the studies focused mainly on the relationship between youth violence and the mediating factors without examining the role played by macro-economic factors. It was also noted that the research does little to address risk factors and intervention strategies at the community level, despite noting that family and individual factors cannot be separated from their community context. The findings of the literature review influenced the research brought into the volume by the contributors. The remainder of the introductory chapter summarizes and reviews the three main parts of the volume and their chapters, with a section at the end on the outstanding issues and questions the research included presents.

The first chapter in Part I, “The Net Effect of the Business Cycle on Crime and Violence” is written by Shawn Bushway, Philip J. Cook, and Matthew Phillips. They explain their goal of seeking to analyze the result of short-term fluctuations in economic factors as well as the overall effect of business cycles on aspects of crime through their study of family violence and the rates of suicide and arrest for specific age groups. Unlike previous studies on the subject, the authors did not seek to establish or single out any specific causal link due to the complexities and interwoven nature of the social processes being studied. The authors stated the questions that their research hoped to answer: “Do recessions cause an increase or reduction in the rate of some types of crime or violence?”

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And more generally, do fluctuations in macroeconomic activity have contemporaneous effects on rates of crime and violence? If so, how large are the effects?” (Rosenfeld et al. 2013, p. 25). Throughout the chapter, the authors cite several previous studies and findings to supplement their own research, relying heavily upon and expanding a report published in 1985 by Cook and Zarkin. They found that crime is influenced by business cycles in at least four ways: legitimate opportunities, criminal opportunities, drugs and alcohol, and police and corrections (Rosenfeld et al. 2013, p. 27). They also found that age played a factor in terms of the relation between the economy and crime. A previous study found that the effect that economic factors had on the rate of adolescent crime was regulated by the family, schools, illicit street markets, and local government agencies. The authors described economic factors and the changes they elicited in various crime rates as a “black box” in which business cycle dates, unemployment rates, unemployment rates, and GDP/capita were taken in and the resulting rates of homicide, suicide, and four other Part 1 crime types were found. In conclusion, the black box yielded the following result: in general, murder is not tied to business cycles while burglary and robbery increase as the economy worsens. The suicide rates for youths under 15 is procyclical despite being countercyclical for adults over 24, and the rates of auto theft amongst those under 18 is also procyclical. The authors admit to their results being answers to a set of narrow questions, and also accept that any inferences on cause are merely speculation and that, as a result of the darkness of the black box, they are unable to determine with any certainty why rates of robbery, burglary, and murder followed those patterns.

The next chapter in Part I, “Are the Criminogenic Consequences of Economic Downturns Conditional? Assessing Potential Moderators of the Link between Adverse Economic Conditions and Crime Rates,” is written by Eric P. Baumer, Richard Rosenfeld, and Kevin T. Wolff. The authors’ research is centered on the search for why crime rates do not increase linearly with a worsening economic climate and fall as the economy thrives. Their central argument is that this linear relationship is present only under certain conditions, which they defined through their own research. They stated that the presence of economic factors such as the level of inflation, the perceived cost of criminal activity, illicit drug use, and government income-replacement affect crime rates in ways often attributed to the more studied signs of economic hardship like rising unemployment rates, and that a failure to give attention to these additional factors has left previous research results ambiguous. The linear relationship is affected by the fact that not all economic downturns occur in the same broader social or economic context. To connect the two sets of factors, the authors studied how the size of

the police force, incarceration, illicit drug use, levels of inflation, and unemployment insurance affected the influence of declining wages and GDP and rising unemployment and consumer pessimism on crime rates across a 29 year time span in 82 US cities. They found that higher rates of unemployment only result in higher rates of property crime when inflation levels were high, and inflation had the same relationship to high levels of homicide and lowered average wages. High rates of incarceration cause high levels of unemployment and low GDP less likely to result in higher rates of property crime, while lowering crime rates in conjunction with higher average wages. However, they found that, contrary to their expectations, unemployment insurance benefits and illegal drug activity did not seem to influence crime rates. The ultimate result of the study is that, while strong conclusions about relationships between specific factors could not be drawn, future research should recognize the complexity of the relationship between crime rates and economic conditions.

Chapter 4, the final chapter of Part I, is written by Janet L. Lauritsen, Ekaterina Gorislavsky, and Karen Heimer and is titled “Economic Conditions and Violent Victimization Trends among Youth: Guns, Violence, and Homicide, 1973–2005”. In this chapter, the authors focus on nonfatal youth violence and do so by using not only recent data but also data from the economic falls in the 1970 and 1980s. It aims to show not only the relationship between youth violence and economic conditions but also how the trends of nonfatal violence might be different from homicide trends. It should be noted that this survey, unlike the ones before it, focuses on rates of victimization, not perpetration, among youth. They also break down the data into demographic groupings of gender, race, and ethnicity. The data was collected from the National Crime Survey (NCS) and the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which the authors describe the strengths and weaknesses of. The economic indicators measured were general and subgroup specific trends in poverty and unemployment, as well as the Index of Consumer Sentiment (ICS). The ICS is a measurement “derived from a longstanding and ongoing survey of US adults that includes questions about personal finances, assessments of the economy now and in the short and long term, and consumers’ willingness to purchase large household items” (Rosenfeld et al. 2013, p. 93). Their findings showed that youth poverty and unemployment specifically showed the strongest influence on the violence trends, and as a result those measurements were used in analysis over the more general or race-specific measurements. Consumer sentiment was chosen as the indicator most closely associated with violence against male youth, and youth poverty was shown to have the strongest ties to female youth violence. Black males and females have been shown to have the highest rates of violent crime

victimization, with Latino males rising to similarly high levels at some points. While fluctuations in data around the 1980 and 1990s were elaborated on, the authors mention that other contextual factors such as gang activity, the pace of urban decay, and rising crack-cocaine markets could have had impacts on both economic and criminal factors. This study, like the others before it, is forced to conclude that the relationship between crime and the economy is complex and multi-faceted. They add to this understanding with the notion that demographic factors such as gender and race are important influences.

Part II: The Neighborhood Context opens with Chapter 5 titled “The Nonlinear Effect of Neighborhood Disadvantage on Youth Violence: Neighborhood Effects on Youth Violence”. The authors, Xiangming Fang, Richard Rosenfeld, Linda L. Dahlberg, and Curtis S. Florence seek to determine whether there is a linear or nonlinear relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and violent behavior by youth, and whether there is a disadvantage threshold or ceiling in regards to its influence on violence. They also attempt to address conflicts within previous studies into neighborhood disadvantage, such as family self-selection bias. The study used data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health). The results of the Add Health survey were considered representative of students age 11–21 across the nation, but were taken from the 1994–1995 school year. Despite the age of the data, the Add Health survey was used because it provided valuable contextual data that allowed for adjusting of specific sociodemographic factors and also allowed for greater generalizability. When controlling for individual attributes, family characteristics, school characteristics, and community residential stability, the results of the study found reliably strong evidence of a nonlinear relationship between youth violence and neighborhood disadvantage and of both ceiling and threshold effects. The 20 % of the adolescents living in the midlevel of neighborhood advantage were the only group to show significantly larger rates of violent behavior. The end of the chapter focuses on the other neighborhood characteristics and selection factors that could have affected the results, and the implications that the results might have for future policy and research.

Robert D. Crutchfield and Tim Wadsworth authored the second chapter of Part II titled “Aggravated Inequality: Neighborhood Economics, Schools, and Juvenile Delinquency”. Adolescents are not old enough to be a part of the full-time labor force, yet are the instigators of more urban crime than adults, a fact only briefly addressed in other studies of how labor markets impact rates of youth violence. The chapter studies that issue through the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and youth attachment and investment in what could arguably be

considered an adolescent’s full time employment—school. The authors examine the effects of three aspects of the labor market on youth’s scholastic attitudes and achievement and delinquency: neighborhood economic trends, parental work experience, and minor employment. The study used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth that focused on female main respondents from the 1979 sample and their children that were between the ages of 14 and 18 at the time of 1998 wave of survey responses. The study’s dependent variable was an index of delinquent behavior that was created through compiling the yes/no reports of adolescents to the following behaviors: “skipped school without permission, damaged property of others on purpose, got into a fight at work or school, took something without paying for it, took something worth under \$50 not from a store, used force to get money from someone, hit or seriously threatened someone, attacked someone to hurt or kill, tried to con someone, took a vehicle without permission of the owner, broke into a building or vehicle to steal or look, knowingly held or sold stolen goods, helped in a gambling operation, hurt someone enough to need a doctor, lied to parents about something important, and misbehaved so that parent had to come to school.” (Rosenfeld et al. 2013, p. 161). In their results, the authors explain that, while previous research has found that higher grades result in a lower likelihood of becoming involved in criminal behavior, the same cannot be said of adolescents in disadvantaged or urban areas. The authors theorize that the effects of success in illegitimate job markets, a sense of frustration, and a need to fit in with peers result in a positive correlation between scholastic achievement and delinquency in disadvantaged areas. They end the chapter with the conclusion that, because children and adolescents lack the mobility of adults, their neighborhoods and local environment can be considered stronger influences on them than for adults.

Chapter 7, “Street Markets, Adolescent Identity, and Violence: A Generative Dynamic”, presents a study, by Mark Edberg and Philippe Bourgois, into the influence of violent street markets, a domain of economic condition, on the development of identity in adolescents. Street markets are described as being high-risk social spheres that arise from lack of legitimate opportunity and are centered on the movement and sale of illegal goods (Rosenfeld et al. 2013, p. 183). They exist outside the mainstream and develop their own alternative values and methods of social control. The idea of street markets being generative is predicated on the notion that the structure of street markets themselves create continued motivation for violent behavior that becomes separate from prior risk factors. The authors draw on many preexisting studies and researchers to develop their theory of the proximal link between street markets and identity development. They cite the notion of

adolescence as a time of heightened vulnerability and important identity development, even bringing in Erikson's ideas of "ideal prototypes" to describe the ways that the context of street markets assign value to models of violent behavior. After summarizing the way in which previous literature has built the case for their link, they detail how their inferences may impact future policy and practice, with particular emphasis on what they refer to as the principle of substitution.

Jeffrey Fagan and Valerie West tackle "Incarceration and the Economic Fortunes of Urban Neighborhoods" in Chapter 8, the final chapter of Part II. The authors move from a general discussion of the impact of incarceration on individuals and broader society in which they live before focusing on the complicated interplay between spatial incarceration, crime, and neighborhood disadvantage. Specifically, their study sought to identify the effects of incarceration on neighborhood median household income and human capital through an analysis of a New York City panel study from 1985 to 1997. The 11-year span of data showed that, despite rising and falling overall crime rates, incarceration rates rose steadily in specific neighborhoods. The authors hypothesize that higher incarceration rates result in lower levels of human capital and income, which have adverse effects on crime. They write an extensive comparison of previous studies and how they describe the effects of incarceration on economic condition, family life, and social regulation within the community before more on to the statistical analysis of the data from the New York City study. The study found that jail and prison stays have different effects on communities, with jail time being less visible but having a stronger impact. Another result of the study was that household income was more strongly affected by incarceration than human capital. Incarceration's downward pull on income results in what was referred to as a "poverty trap" in which cycles of crime and poverty result in further economic crises. Race and ethnicity were also found to impact income in unanticipated ways, which the authors urge further analysis on. In regards to human capital, the study found no effect was drawn from incarceration rates, and posited that education policy might have more control over that variable. The chapter concludes with a look at policy changes that could make use of the findings, such as neighborhood-specific business and housing investment.

Part III is focused on Child Development, Families, and Youth Violence and begins with a chapter by Nancy G. Guerra titled "Macroeconomic Factors, Youth Violence, and the Developing Child". The aim of the chapter is to describe the effects of economic factors on learned aggression and violent behavior through developmental stages from birth to adolescence, with specific importance placed on early childhood neurological development. The

author references the other studies in the volume to support her point that studies of macroeconomic effects on youth violence are incomplete without also studying the ways that various economic factors can affect children even before they are born. While it can be said that children raised in economic hardship are at risk for problematic development, the author argues that economic downturns' effects are amplified by the specific ways they impact particular stages of development. She notes that adverse developmental influence is cumulative, and this cumulative effect has given rise to a field of thought referred to as "developmental or life-course criminology" (Rosenfeld et al. 2013, p. 259). The body of the chapter is broken up into age periods: prenatal to 5, early school years (6–11), and adolescence (12–18). Each section deals with specific economic conditions that have particularly strong influences on development during the age range. In the earliest stage, families and in turn the community effects that influence them have the strongest impact on development. Young children in disadvantaged communities are faced with the twin problems of community stressors on parents and a parental inability to protect young children from adverse environmental effects, such as abuse and exposure to toxins. Poverty's effect on health care in general results in many biological effects in young children that may predispose them for aggressive behavior. For the next age group, entering school poses its own set of problems and developmental difficulties for children already affected by poverty. Academic problems that result from a lack of developmental educational opportunities lead to frustration and a lack of attachment to school, and a failure to adapt quickly to social rules introduced in a larger peer network can result in aggressive responses to alienation. However, if the prevailing social climate is one that accepts violent behavior, violence is encouraged and is even more easily assimilated into the child's personality. For adolescents, the snowballing effect of previous developmental issues comes to a head while they grapple with age and opportunity restraints. It is during this period that a path towards violence is truly solidified, as previous errors result in the closing of choices. The advanced role of peer groups also factor into the move towards violence in adolescence. The end of the chapter deals with policy recommendations to address the needs of poor urban communities, such as making important resources for health care universally available.

The second and last chapter of Part III, titled "Macroeconomic Factors and Inequities in Youth Violence: The Cyclical Relationship between Community Conditions, Family Factors, and Youth Violence", is written by Jennifer L. Matjasko, Sarah Beth Barnett, and James A. Mercy. The authors review previous studies and research in an attempt to explain the continuous racial

inequalities in youth violence by a long-term cyclical relationship with economic factors. An important point to note is that racial differences in self-reported data are much smaller than the differences in arrest, which may display an amount of biased practices on the side of police officers. The authors reinforce data found in other chapters in the volume by basing their theory on wider changes in the economy adversely affecting local communities, which in turn adds stressors to families. These stressors, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, can present developmental difficulties due to lack of parental protection and nurturing. Taken all together, these factors form cycles in certain neighborhoods that are hard to break, due to the lessened economic opportunities available to youth already involved in a life of violence. Because disadvantaged communities are more likely to lack support resources, changes in the broader economic landscape are more likely to impact them. Race being closely related to socioeconomic class results in racially skewed disadvantaged communities. The chapter closes with discussion on policy and prevention, with steps to break the recursive nature of the problem highlighted.

Part IV: Looking to the Future presents the final chapter titled “Economic Opportunity and Youth Violence Conclusions and Implications for Future Research”. In this concluding chapter, authors Curtis S. Florence and Sarah Beth Barnett summarize the findings of the rest of the volume and answer the question “What have we learned that can be useful in preventing violence?” (Rosenfeld et al. 2013, p. 306). The answer to that question lies in

knowing what economic conditions can be changed to prevent violence. While detailed studies into programs that deliberately target violence reduction through the improvement of economic conditions do not yet exist, business improvement and housing voucher programs are a step in the right direction. The authors claim that the project adds valuable information for both current and future use in program creation and evaluation.

Economics and Youth Violence: Crime, Disadvantage, and Community expertly collects the relevant data and studies on economic effects on youth violence and analyzes them in such a way that allows for future research on the subject to benefit. Each study in the volume was very aware of its uncertainty and speculative nature, and even took steps to call attention to other studies that mistakenly assumed causal relationships from their data. The volume successfully illustrated the complex pathways through which broad economic conditions impact rates of youth violence and the intervening factors at play. No longer can simple and broad linear connections be made between poverty and youth violence.

Conflict of interest The author reports no conflict of interest.

Reference

- Rosenfeld, R., Edberg, M., Fang, X., & Florence, C. (2013). *Economics and youth violence: Crime, disadvantage, and community*. New York, NY: New York University Press.