

Child Homicide Victimization and Community Context: A Research Note

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Abstract : Among serious crimes, child homicide is a rather rare event. However, the killing of children stirs up a special type of emotion in society that pales other criminal acts. This study examines the relevancy of three possible community-level explanations for child homicide: social deprivation, female empowerment, and social isolation. The social deprivation hypothesis posits that child homicide results from lack of resources in communities. The female empowerment hypothesis argues that a higher female status translates into a higher level of capability to prevent child homicide. Finally, the social isolation hypothesis regards child homicide as a result of lack of social connectivity. Child homicide data, aggregated by US postal ZIP codes in California from 1990 to 1999, were analyzed with a negative binomial regression. The results of the negative binomial analysis demonstrate that social deprivation is the most salient and consistent predictor among all other factors in explaining child homicide victimization at the ZIP-code level. Both social isolation and female labor force participation are weak predictors of child homicide victimization across communities. Further, results from the negative binomial regression show that it is the communities with a higher, not lower, degree of female labor force participation that are associated with a higher count of child homicide. It is possible that poor communities with a higher level of female employment have a lesser capacity to provide the necessary care and protection for the children. Policies aiming at reducing social deprivation and strengthening female empowerment possess the potential to reduce child homicide in the community.

Keywords : child homicide, deprivation, empowerment, isolation

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