

Social Problems and Juvenile Delinquency in Ecological Perspective

Soziale Probleme und Jugenddelinquenz im sozialökologischen Kontext

*Department of Criminology, Max Planck Institute of Foreign and International
Criminal Law Freiburg, Germany*

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Dietrich Oberwittler

Social Exclusion and Youth Crime in Europe – The Spatial Dimension

Do disadvantaged neighbourhoods cause
adolescents to become more delinquent?

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Dietrich Oberwittler (d.oberwittler@iuscrim.mpg.de)

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Probably few observations have a longer tradition in criminology than the co-occurrence of poverty and crime in certain quarters of the big cities whether they have been called slums, ghettos, or more recently ‘disadvantaged neighbourhoods’. The classic descriptions of lower- and working class districts in Victorian England as Henry Mayhew’s (1861) ‘London Labour and London Poor’ or Friedrich Engel’s (1845) ‘The condition of the working class in England’ are well-known examples from a time when criminology wasn’t even invented. Subsequent generations of criminologists have offered their accounts and theories on the spatial concentration of crime in these urban areas, yet increasingly sidelined by alternative approaches in which poverty and class became less and less relevant. However, during the last decade there has clearly been a revival of interest into the links between communities and crime, as well as related phenomena like health, education etc. One of the reasons for this revival is the feeling of many people that cities are becoming more and more divided, and that youth violence is increasing as a result of this. My starting point for this presentation is a recent and popular concept of this resurgence: ‘Social exclusion’. If you look to *graph 1*, the term ‘social exclusion’ did not appear in the (English-speaking) scientific literature before the early 1990s, and within only a few years has multiplied to around one hundred publications annually. The closely related term ‘social capital’ has had an even more impressive career, from almost naught to more than 250 publications each year within a decade. Interestingly, and I will come back to this, both terms have been coined or have at least very strong roots in French sociology, and ‘social exclusion’ is still very much an European concept which is rarely used in the U.S. (Silver/Miller 2003).

To give you an overview over this presentation,

- I will briefly discuss ‘social exclusion’ as an analytical concept for crime research, and look to some of the empirical evidence of social exclusion and its recent development in Europe
- I will focus on the spatial dimension of social exclusion, argue for the advantages of a multilevel perspective in which the neighbourhood is one important level,
- I will give a short and sketchy overview on research results on neighbourhoods and youth crime in Europe and the US
- and will finally, by presenting some empirical results of a recently finished research project, highlight the need for a more complex understanding of how individuals interact with their urban environment

The concept 'social exclusion'

There is a vast and partly controversial literature on the concept of social exclusion.¹ It seems safe to say that social exclusion is a comprehensive concept which goes far beyond material deprivation and addresses the lack of participation and integration into mainstream society in many life-spheres, as education, culture, and politics (Murie/Musterd 2004). Social exclusion is as much about the consequences of poverty as about poverty itself. By doing so, it reflects the normative ambitions of European welfare states about social rights and equal life-chances for all citizens. This idea has been particularly strong in France where the term social exclusion originated in the 1970s. In Britain, New Labour has embraced this concept and even installed a 'Social Exclusion Unit' within the government. In the United States, on the other hand, poverty is still viewed more narrowly as lack of income and material deprivation (Silver/Miller 2003). Whereas this certainly holds true for US government policies, academic research into poverty and its consequences is more advanced and has given European researchers important impulses (Micklewright 2003; Small/Newman 2001).

Even though social exclusion is a multi-dimensional concept, unemployment and poverty is still the core issue, and also the easiest to measure. The lack of integration into the labour market frequently leads to material deprivation and disadvantages in other fields. There is a growing rate of long-term unemployment in Europe which affects mostly low educated workers and ethnic minorities. Furthermore, unemployment and material poverty are assumed to have particularly bad consequences for children and adolescents because attitudes, abilities and opportunities are formed in early age. Yet, empirical studies at least in Europe have mostly not produced strong support for these claims.

What is the empirical evidence of social exclusion, especially of children and adolescents, and its development in Europe? The first of a series of graphs (*graph 2*) shows that the youth unemployment rate is much higher than the general unemployment rate, and has only declined slightly during recent years. If we look to a map of Europe (*graph 3*), youth unemployment is particularly high in central and Eastern Europe, in south Italy and Spain and in parts of Scotland and Finland. The so-called 'Urban Audit', a new program of city-level statistics within the European Union, allows for an even more detailed picture (*graph 4*). There is a considerable variation of youth unemployment between the major cities within countries, reaching up

¹ For an extensive recent literature review, see Bradshaw et al. (2004).

to 40% in the worst affected French and more than 50% in some Polish cities. This is a first hint at *spatial* concentrations of disadvantage.

Another widely used indicator of social exclusion is child poverty, defined as the rate of children who live in households with less than half of the national mean income. It is important to note that this is a relative measure, depending on the average income levels of each country, and in effect reflects income inequality. *Graph 5* shows that the Scandinavian countries have the lowest child poverty rates, followed by west and central European countries including some of the new member states. Both south European states and the UK and Ireland have the highest levels of child poverty, but still some way off the US where more than every fifth child lives under the poverty line. This picture seem to confirm broadly a typology of welfare regimes within the industrialized world, where Scandinavia represents the most generous, social democratic welfare model, some continental European countries the corporate, and the Anglo-Saxon countries the restricted liberal welfare model (Esping-Anderson 1990).

Over the last decade, child poverty has increased in most European countries, especially in the new member states (*graph 6*). The only marked exception is the UK where a new redistributive policy has considerably increased welfare benefits for poor families. This highlights the important fact that the consequences of market failures can be cushioned by social policies, which is being done to quite varying degrees across Europe (Brady 2005). In some countries, unemployment (at least if it is not persistent) does not necessarily lead to poverty, whereas in other countries even those in work may face poverty – the so called ‘working poor’. I only mention here in brackets that Messner and Rosenfeld’s (1997) ‘institutional anomie theory’ looks specifically to the impact of these state policies on cross-national levels of violence.

It is almost trivial to mention migration as another crucial aspect of social exclusion. Most European countries have increasing ethnic minority populations, and these tend to be much more affected by social exclusion, because they fill the lower ranks of the work force, are on average less qualified, more often unemployed, may be discriminated against, and/or may find it difficult to assimilate into the mainstream culture. In countries like Germany, France and Britain, the topics of social exclusion and migration are obviously very closely linked; however, this conjunction does not exist in those European countries which until recently did not experience considerable immigration yet face high levels of poverty, like Italy and Portugal.

The spatial dimension

Finally, and most importantly for the topic of this presentation, social exclusion has a spatial dimension. Due to the process of segregation which is largely driven by housing markets, people who are in one or more ways disadvantaged often find themselves living in the least desirable areas of the cities side by side with many other disadvantaged residents. Segregation may also work along ethnic lines and partly reflect a wish to live in ethnically homogenous enclaves. Hence, poverty-related and ethnic patterns of segregation certainly overlap but are far from identical. An example for quite different segregation levels of ethnic groups is *graph 7* which compares the major ethnic minorities in two cities – Cologne in Germany and Bradford in Britain. 30 % of the largest minority group in Cologne – the Turkish – live in the 10% of neighbourhoods, whereas 50% of neighbourhoods have hardly any Turkish residents. Compared to Cologne, the segregation of Asians in Bradford is much more extreme: almost half of them live in just 10% of the neighbourhoods. A recent study found that the segregation is even more extreme in schools in Bradford (Burgess et al. 2005). As mentioned earlier, Bradford has seen violent riots in 2001, and a government report later made the claim that the Asian population in Bradford lead ‘parallel lives’ poorly connected to the host society (Home Office 2001).

Whether this spatial concentration of social disadvantage actually is a force of social exclusion in its own right, particularly with respect to children and adolescents, is the key question for this presentation. What are the consequences of growing up in a poor and disadvantaged neighbourhood? Is there a causal link between concentrated disadvantage and youth crime? A growing research literature in Europe and even more so in the US is looking to a multitude of possible influences and outcomes related to the spatial concentration of poverty and disadvantage in urban areas (Sampson et al. 2002). Although the results of these studies are rather inconsistent, theory as well as common sense seem to support the idea that spatial concentrations of disadvantage can make social ills worse.

Before I go into this issue more closely, let me summarize the main idea that social exclusion can affect people on different levels (*graph 8*). Following Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological approach to child development, this multilevel model starts from top down with the macro-level of countries. As we have seen, European countries differ in economic performance and welfare policies, which directly shapes the extent and experience of individual social exclusion. On a meso-level, the degree to which social disadvantage is spatially concentrated could have an additional impact on individual behaviour and life-chances. This meso-level concerns the concrete environments (or social contexts) of daily life experiences. In the case

of children and adolescents, neighbourhood and school are the main social contexts. Finally, on the micro-level there are individuals (and families) who are exposed to these social contexts and behave in them in certain ways, and by their behaviour may in turn collectively shape their social environments (which is indicated in the graph by the small upward arrows). To illustrate this reciprocal effect, a recent study in the US by Greenbaum and Tita (2004) showed that neighbourhoods which saw an large increase in homicides during the late 1980s subsequently lost local businesses and jobs, hence further deteriorating local infrastructure and living-conditions (see also Skogan 1986, Morenoff/Sampson 1997).

In the remaining part of my presentation, I will focus solely on the meso-level of neighbourhoods and schools, as most research has done. However, it is important to keep in mind that neighbourhood conditions are significantly shaped by macro-level factors like national economies and welfare policies (Briggs 2003). Neighbourhood studies combined with cross-national comparisons would make this more obvious, yet are difficult to conduct and still very rare. Two exceptions are Loic Wacquant's (1996) ethnographic study of a French *banlieue* and an US ghetto and Sampson and Wikström's (in press) quantitative comparison of Stockholm and Chicago neighbourhoods; both stress the huge differences between Europe and the US in the scale of social exclusion and crime, especially violence. The causes of these differences lie of course not on the neighbourhood level, but on the macro-level.

Recent studies on disadvantaged neighbourhoods and their impact on residents have used different approaches. One group, mainly ethnographic studies, but some also using quantitative techniques, have selected one or few disadvantaged neighbourhoods as case studies. Studies by French sociologists on adolescents' experiences of daily life in the *banlieues*, the public housing estates on the outskirts of large French cities, are a prominent example (Dubet/Lapeyronnie 1992; Body-Gendrot 2005). While they have produced important and in-depth knowledge of these neighbourhoods, a big problem of this 'case study approach' is that the basic assumption that the spatial concentration of social disadvantage *has* an exacerbating effect on problem behaviour is taken for granted, and not put to an empirical test. This may not be a problem in the case of collective police riots which are a distinct feature of the most segregated neighbourhoods. But it is by no means self-evident that the amount of individual violence, drug use or property crimes by adolescents living in these neighbourhoods is actually much higher than that of other adolescents.

So, what does it really mean to claim that spatially concentrated disadvantage has a negative impact on adolescent behaviour and future life-chances? It means that there is an *additional*

context-level effect of the neighbourhood over and above the individual-level effects of social disadvantage (Duncan/Raudenbush 2001). For example, a child whose parents are unemployed but lives in an affluent neighbourhood has better prospects than a similar child whose parents are unemployed *and* lives in a deprived neighbourhood.

Most quantitative studies on neighbourhood effects therefore include either all or at least a large variation of different neighbourhoods from a city or a larger geographical area. These studies then try to disentangle the effects of individual factors from the effects of the concentration of these individual factors on the neighbourhood level, often using so-called multilevel analysis or hierarchical linear modelling software as MLWin or HLM (Hox 2002; Raudenbush/Bryk 2002). This statistical technique has been developed only about 15 years ago, and is now being increasingly used by social scientists and criminologists. Multilevel analysis makes it possible to identify the unique impact of neighbourhood- (or school-)level factors after controlling for the socio-demographic composition and other relevant influences on the individual level. However, this approach is not without problems. There is a danger of both ‘under controlling’ for, that is omitting individual-level factors relevant for the outcome the impact of which may then wrongly be attributed to the neighbourhood, as well as ‘over controlling’ for factors which seem to be purely individual but are in fact shaped by the neighbourhood, with the result of underestimating the impact of the neighbourhood. It is particularly difficult for cross-sectional studies to draw conclusions about context effects, and longitudinal studies are better suited to deal with this problem (Duncan/Raudenbush 2001).

Results of European and US studies

What are the results of recent multilevel studies on neighbourhood effects on youth crime? The studies listed in *graph 9* are based on self-reports or parents or teacher assessments. As this list shows, the picture is rather inconsistent, and only two of these studies have found a significant neighbourhood effect on the overall levels of youth crime. One has to be very cautious to generalize these very few studies, but it seems that the spatial dimension of social exclusion is not as important as many believe. So, if youth crime is not affected by spatial exclusion, may be other outcomes are? One of the key assumptions of social exclusion is that living in poor neighbourhoods reduces education and labour market prospects, and people remain trapped in poverty. Yet, again, the empirical results are rather mixed (*graph 10*). Some studies support the hypothesis, others reject it. In contrast, studies from the US draw a rather different picture (*graph 11*). There are more (and also more rigorous) studies which support

the notion of neighbourhood effects on youth crime. Again, one should be cautious to draw conclusions on the basis of this sketchy overview, but let's speculate. There is more empirical evidence for the existence of neighbourhood effects on youth crime in the US than in Europe. It seems plausible to link this difference to the much higher scale of social exclusion and spatial segregation in the US; ghettos like in Chicago simply do not exist in Europe. The difference may be even more pronounced because most European studies tend to come from countries with better welfare provisions, like the Netherlands and Sweden. It would be a big step forward to have more cross-national European and also cross-Atlantic studies following the same uniform research design so that the results would be really comparable.

A more complex picture

The picture of neighbourhood influences on children and adolescents is of course more complicated. In many studies, the impact of neighbourhoods has been treated as a black box, and the difficult but important question which social mechanisms translate concentrated disadvantage into individual behaviour has not been addressed. Also, it is often tacitly assumed that adolescents are more or less passively exposed to their environment and respond like a plant to the weather. However, an average increase of crime in a disadvantaged neighbourhood (or its absence) may mask differential responses by certain groups of individuals, and some adolescents may be resilient to adverse conditions due to their own or their parents' agency. The neighbourhood of residence may not even be the context adolescents are most intensely exposed to; for example, the school may be an alternative and competing context which is not identical with the resident neighbourhood. To include all these dimensions into empirical models is quite demanding, and many of these questions remain still unanswered. Nevertheless, I will focus in the last bit of my presentation on some of these intriguing aspects and will illustrate them by reporting results of my own, recently finished study in two German cities (Oberwittler 2004a, 2004b).

Criminology has always been interested in the neighbourhood dimension of crime, and there is no shortage of theories explaining the possible mechanisms. In the current debate, there seem to be two major branches of explanations (*graph 12*): one stressing the role of *adults* who built social capital and exert informal control over adolescents, and another stressing the role of *peers* who may instil and reinforce deviant attitudes and commit crimes together. Finally, the physical environment and urban infrastructure could be a cause of crime in their own right. Although these approaches are sometimes treated as antagonistic, it seems more

realistic that they are interrelated. However, I will show some evidence that the role of delinquent peers is probably the more important one.

The following results come from a cross-sectional youth survey conducted in Cologne and Freiburg, two West German cities of 1 million and 200.000 inhabitants respectively (*graph 13*). Around 4.900 respondents are nested in 68 schools and 61 'neighbourhood' based on census tracts. I will focus on some of the main findings which can shed some light on the questions which I have just raised.

As mentioned earlier in the list of European studies, we found a significant neighbourhood contextual effect on serious youth crime after controlling for individual disadvantage. However, this holds true only for some groups of adolescents, and there are a number of differential effects. First, among the respondents of German origin, *violent* offending increases with neighbourhood disadvantage only for girls, but not for boys (*graph 14*). As a result, the gender gap in violence is nearly closed in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This is not true for serious property offences like car break-in and burglary. Here it is rather the boys who respond to neighbourhood disadvantage.

Second, and this was a really unexpected result, there is no neighbourhood effect on ethnic minority youths (*graph 15, left-hand side*). The level of serious offending by ethnic minority youths is relatively high irrespectively of neighbourhood conditions. This contradicts findings from Chicago where neighbourhood conditions explain a part of the higher crime involvement of minority youths (Sampson et al. 2005).

Third, the impact of neighbourhood disadvantage on German respondents completely depends on the existence of a local friendship network (*graph 15, right-hand side*). We asked the respondents whether their best friends live in the same neighbourhood as they do, or rather in other neighbourhoods. There is no increase of serious offending by neighbourhood disadvantage if the friends come from different neighbourhoods, but a very marked increase for those whose friends do live in the same neighbourhood. This finding hints at the conclusion that the neighbourhood context is only important if friends come from the same neighbourhood, and that contact with (delinquent) peers is therefore a major mechanism translating concentrating disadvantage into youth crime.

As one would expect, the more distant the school is from the place of residence, the more likely it is that adolescents have friends from other neighbourhoods and also spend more of their free time outside their own neighbourhood (*graph 16*). In fact, for half of the respondents the distance between the place of residence and school is more than 2 kilometres. Further analyses show, however, that it is not only the distance to school which determines the

locality of friendship networks. Adolescents make deliberate choices about whom they prefer as friends and where they want to spend their free time, reflecting their liking or disliking of the immediate environment. In most European cities with a relatively small-scale geography and good public transport, there is no real barrier for youths to leave their neighbourhoods, and many do so. The question then is not whether adolescents are trapped in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods (as it may be in US-Ghettos), but why some feel attracted to its subculture, and others remain resilient to it. Our analyses showed that in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods, it is the youths of low educational status and with a preference for unsupervised routine activities that have local friends. The interpretation offered here is very akin to the 'delinquent peers' concept. On the methodological side, the impact of ecological contexts then is a rather inextricable mixture of self selection and reinforcement which also makes it more risky to interpret contextual effect as causal effects.

Family life and parental management is another dimension which moderates the effect of neighbourhood disadvantage on adolescents (*graph 17*). Adolescents whose parents have a good knowledge of where and with whom they spend their time show only a very moderate increase of serious offending compared to those whose parents don't have that knowledge. Thus, parenting strategies can play an important role as a compensating force against neighbourhood dangers (Furstenberg et al. 1999; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn 2000).

To summarize these ideas, the question of neighbourhood effects on youth crime turns out to be quite complex. Individual dispositions, family life, schools, peer networks and routine activities all play together in shaping the interaction between individual and environment. This calls for theoretical approaches which can accommodate these complex layers and levels of explanation. Instead of taking the residential neighbourhood as a fixed environmental context, it makes more sense to actually trace the daily itineraries of adolescents and to build up a measure of their individual 'activity fields', as P.-O. Wikström (2004, Wikström/Butterworth 2006) has proposed, or to use network analysis to capture the dimension of peer relations more accurately (Haynie 2002; Kiesner et al. 2003; Weerman/Smeenk 2005), and also to incorporate the schools as a relevant context alongside neighbourhoods into the explanation of youth crime (Oberwittler, in preparation). The results of new longitudinal studies on youth crime in community contexts which are currently under way in some European countries will hopefully shed more light on these questions.

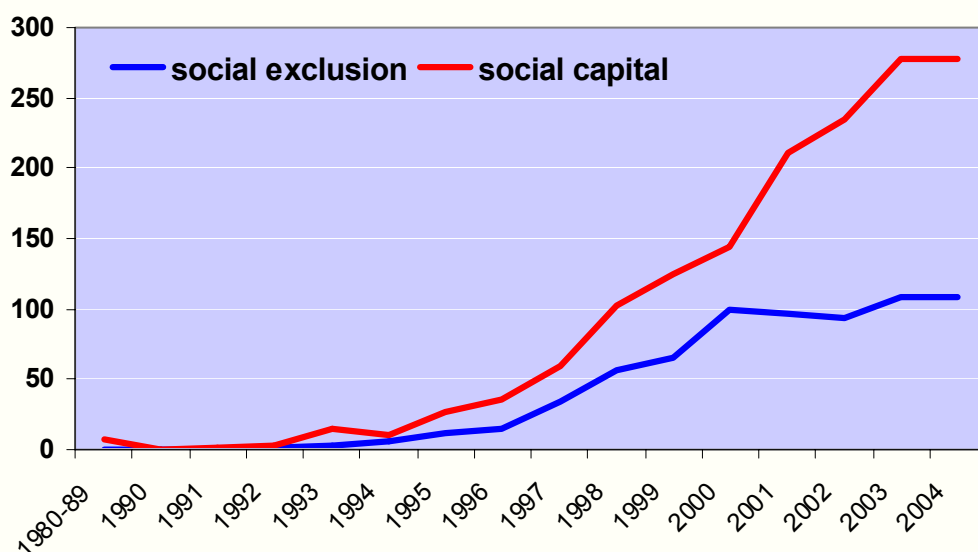
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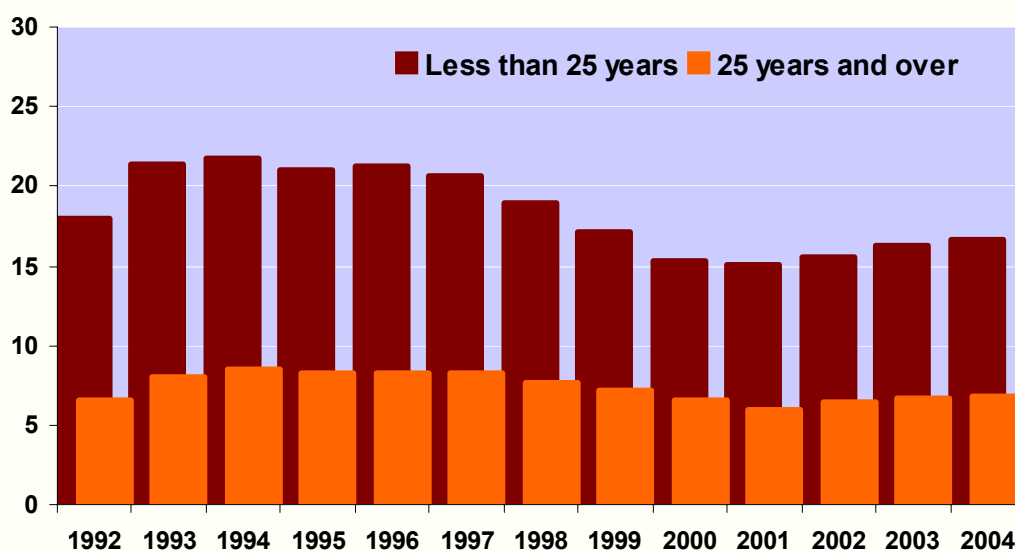
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Graph 1: Yearly number of publications
in *Social Science Citation Index*



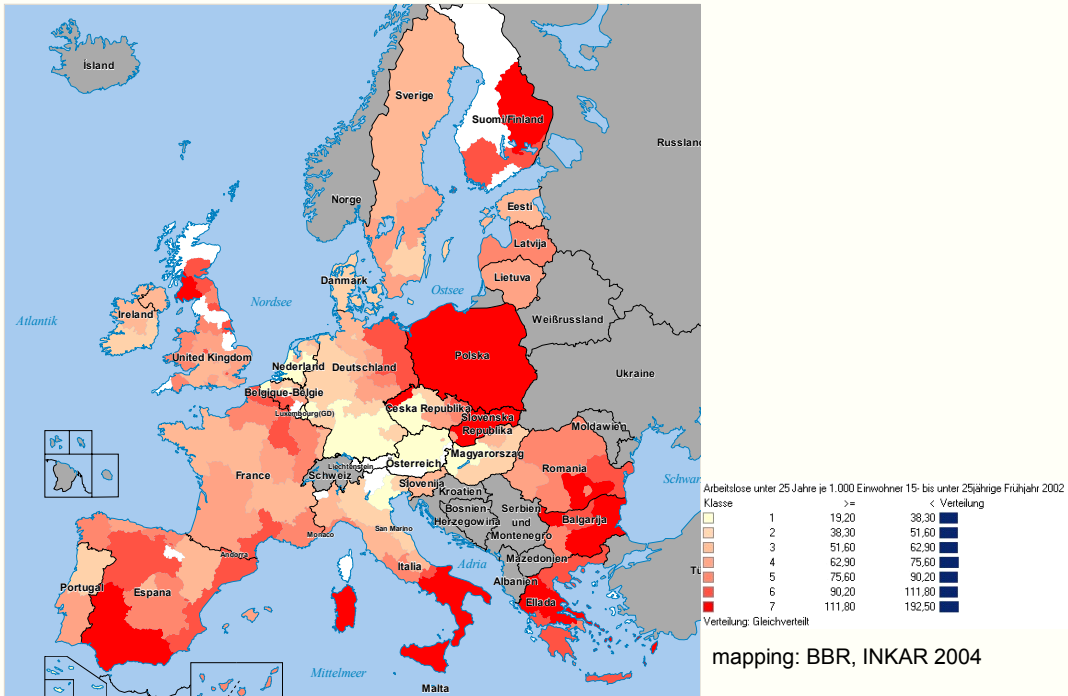
Source: ISI Web of Science, SSCI search in title and abstract, accessed in August 2005)

graph 2: Unemployment rates in EU-15

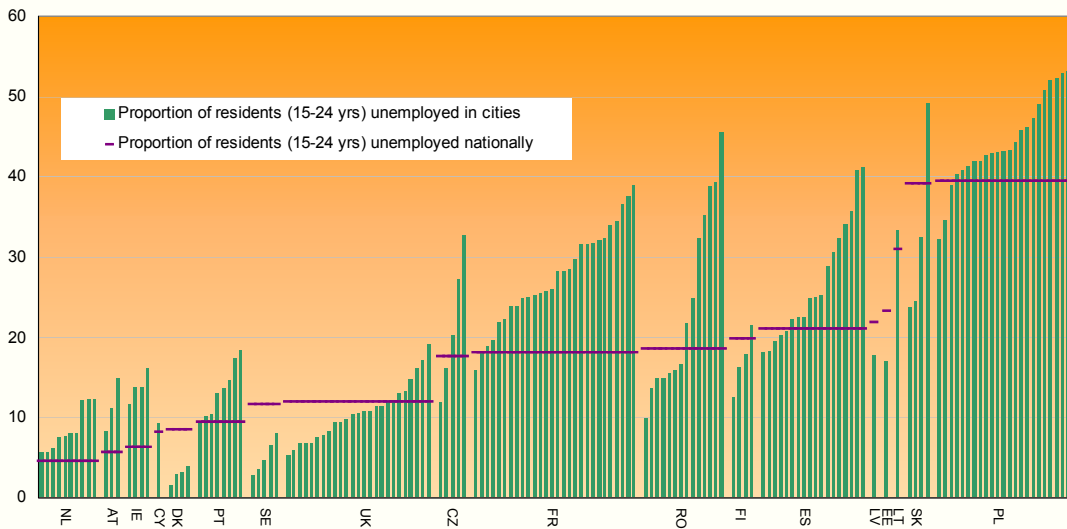


Source: Eurostat Online Database

graph 3: Youth unemployment rate (2002)



Graph 4: Youth Unemployment Rate in Cities and in the Country



Source: Eurostat (2005), Urban Audit

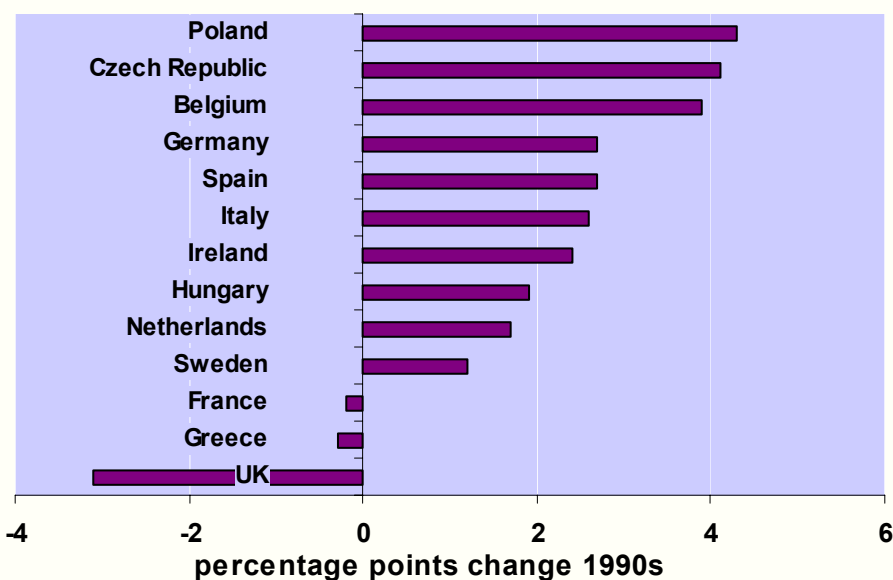


Graph 5: Child poverty in Europe and US in 2000

(percentage of children below 50% of median income)

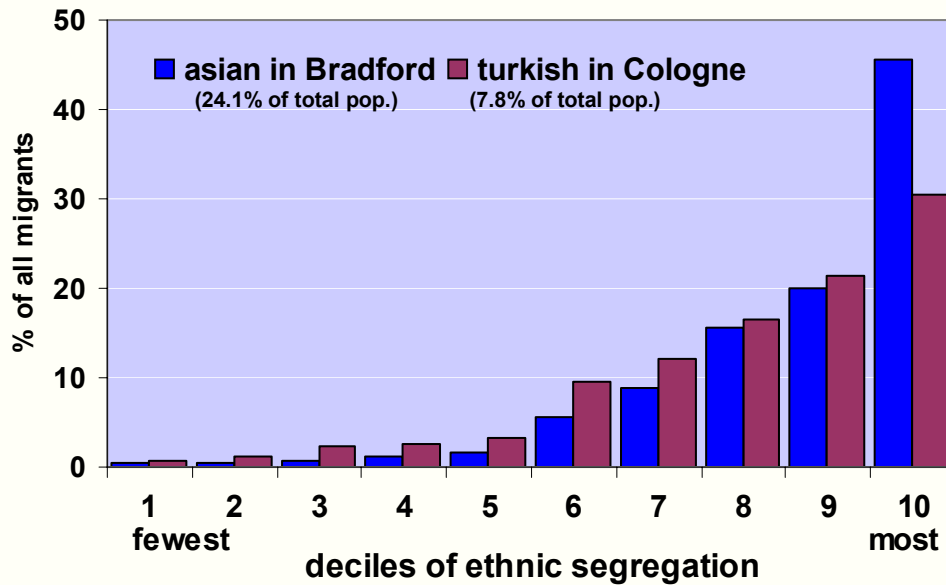
Source: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2005

Graph 6: Change in child poverty during 1990s (percentage points)



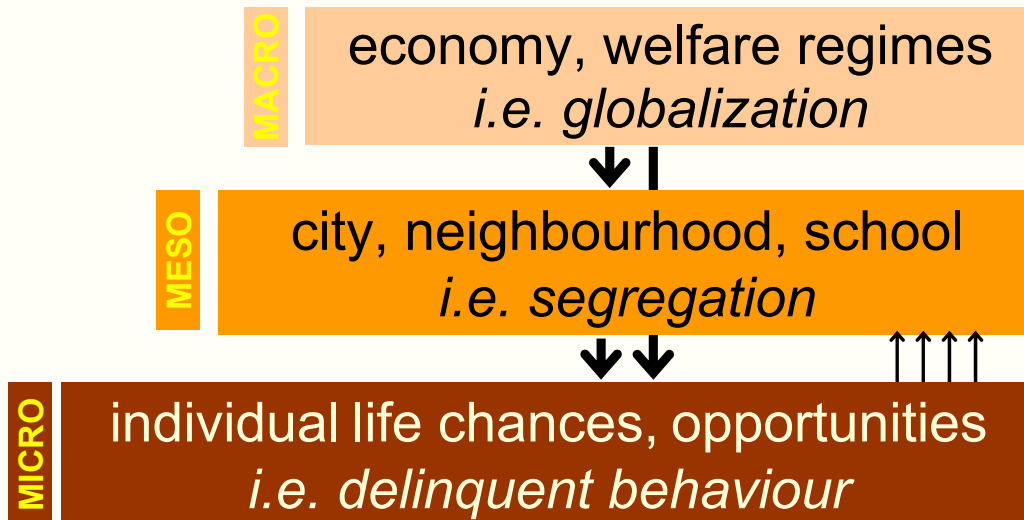
Source: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre 2005

Graph 7: Ethnic segregation in two European cities



Source: Office of National Statistics, Census 2001 (Bradford); City of Cologne (population register 1998)

Graph 8: social exclusion - multilevel model



Graph 9: European studies, neighbourhood effects on levels of youth crime

- Rotterdam/NL (Rovers 1997)
 - no contextual effect
- Netherlands, national sample (Reijneveld et al. 2005)
 - effect, odds ratio 1.69 for externalizing problem behaviour
- Antwerp/BE (Pauwels, in progress)
 - no contextual effect
- Peterborough/UK (Wikström 2002)
 - no contextual effect
- Cologne & Freiburg/GER (Oberwittler 2004)
 - effect only on German adolescents, odds ratio 1.97 for serious property offences

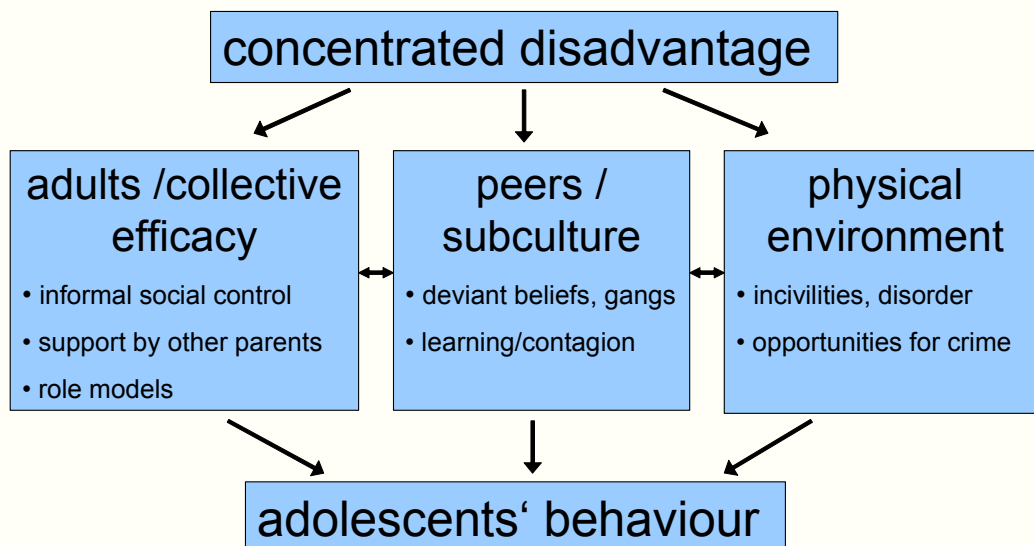
Graph 10: European studies, neighbourhood effects on labour market outcomes

- Netherlands, national sample (Musterd et al. 2003)
 - no effect on length of welfare dependency
- Bielefeld/GER (Farwick 2004)
 - effect on length of welfare dependency
- Stockholm/SE (Brännström 2004)
 - no effect on education & labour market outcomes (but data from 1970s-80s)
- Stockholm/SE (Hedström et al. 2003)
 - effect on length of unemployment for 20-24yrs old

Graph 11: US studies, neighbourhood effects on levels of youth crime

- National Sample, Add Health data (Bellair et al. 2003)
 - census tract unemployment rate increases violent offending
- National Sample, NELS (Hoffmann 2002)
 - zip-code unemployment rate increases delinquency
- Chicago, PHDCN data (Sampson et al. 2005)
 - neighbourhood disadvantage accounts for 33% of gap between black and white adolescents
- Chicago, PHDCN data (Bingenheimer et al. 2005)
 - exposure to firearm violence increases own violence two years later (odds ratio 2.43)
- Chicago, sample of afro-american youths (Rankin and Quane 2002)
 - no effect of concentrated disadvantage

Graph 12: social mechanisms of neighbourhood effects on adolescents

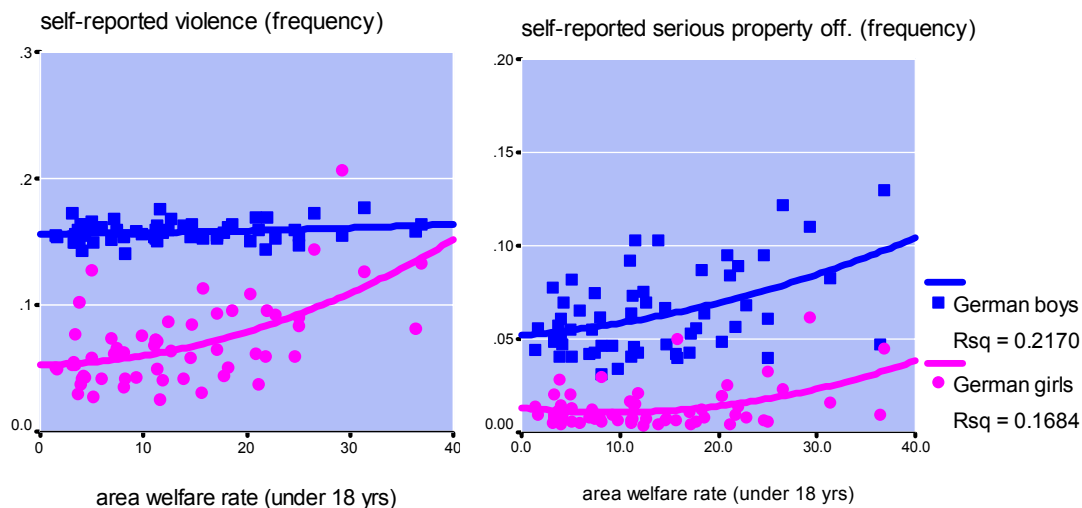


Graph 13: overview Cologne/Freiburg study



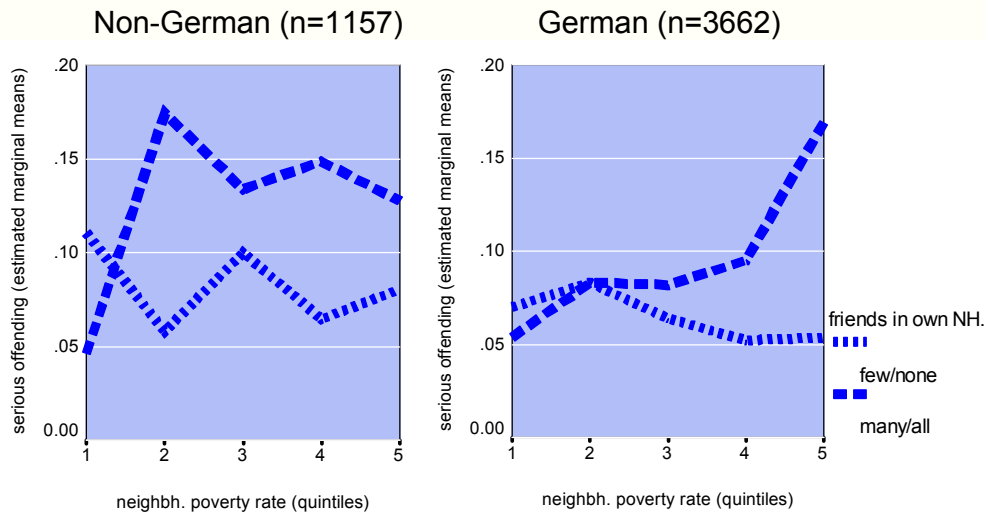
- cross-sectional study 1999/2000 in Cologne (1 million inhabitants) and Freiburg (200.000 inhabitants)
- sample ca. 4.900 students (13 to 16 yrs) in 61 'neighbourhoods' and 68 schools (classroom survey, self reports)
- census data and postal community survey for neighbourhood conditions
- first results of multilevel analysis in *European Journal of Criminology* (2004)

Graph 14: Cologne/Freiburg, only German respondents: offending by neighbourhood disadvantage controlling for individual disadvantage



N=3580 respondents in N=57 neighbourhoods, controlling for parental SES, family structure, unemployment/welfare dependence (HLM Empirical Bayes estimates)

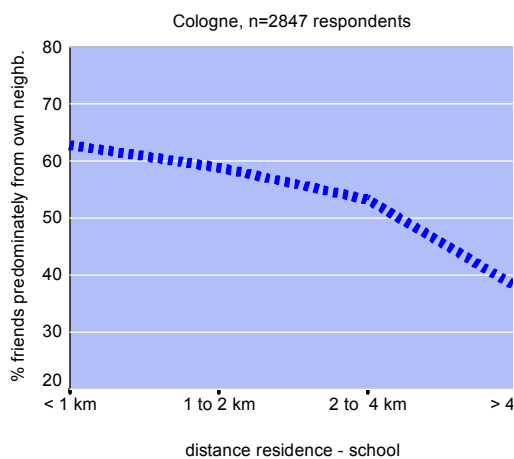
Graph 15: Cologne/Freiburg: serious offending by neighbourhood disadvantage and by locality of friendship circle



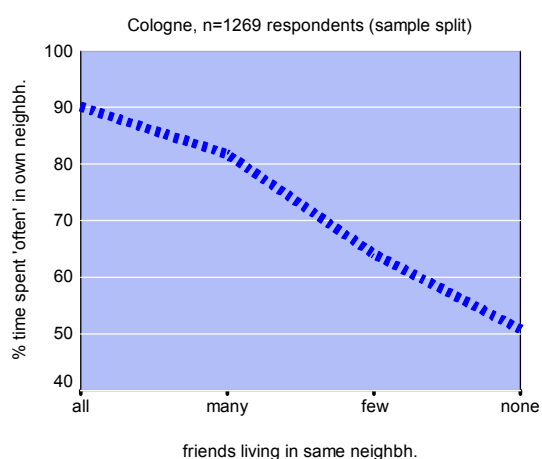
(predicted from ANCOVA with individual-level controls)

Graph 16: Spatial proximity of friends and routine activities

% of 'all/many' friends living in one's own neighbh. by distance home-school



% of free time spend 'often' in one's own neighbh. by locality of friendship circles



Graph 17: Cologne/Freiburg: serious offending by neighbourhood disadvantage and by parental control

