

MicroCase exercise #3:
A look at social disorganization theory

INTRODUCTION

In these data analysis exercises, we will use Wave VII data from the National Youth Survey (Elliott, 1996) to explore social disorganization theory, a theory presented in Part V.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DATASET

In 1976, a team of researchers administered the first wave of the National Youth Survey. This comprehensive survey asked juveniles about their attitudes toward and participation in deviant acts. The survey also queried the youths about their home lives, friends, and work/school activities. In 1987, the seventh wave of the survey was administered and focused on events and behaviors that occurred during 1986, when the participants were in their twenties.

The original National Youth Survey Wave VII data included 1,730 variables for 1,725 individuals. The data for this exercise in this book do not include the 343 cases for which many of the self-reported delinquency data are missing. This leaves a total of 1,382 cases. If you are interested in obtaining the entire dataset, you may do so by contacting ICPSR, the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. Enough about the dataset, let's do some analyses.

Before we start, we'll need to load up our dataset. We'll do this the same way we did for the first MicroCase exercise (#1), except we need the dataset called "NYSCRIME."

EXPLORING SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION THEORY: GETTING A HANDLE ON THE DATA

Part V presents some of the early theories that were developed to explain crime. Social disorganization theory is one such theory that still holds its predictive charm. Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay noted that juvenile delinquents tended to live in certain neighborhoods. It did not take long for the two researchers to begin looking at the high-delinquency neighborhoods to see what made them different from neighborhoods that had less delinquency. They found that delinquents appeared to come from neighborhoods characterized by low rental fees, a high incidence of individuals supported by public assistance, a high percentage of industrial (low-level blue collar) workers, and a high rate of individuals moving into and out of the area (i.e., the population is in flux). Visual clues like boarded-up houses and buildings with broken windows indicate areas where crime and delinquents exist side by side. In Shaw and McKay's model, crime was related to the communities in which it occurred. Fortunately, the NYS has several good questions that make it good for testing some of the tenets of social disorganization theory.

Rather than run frequencies on the demographic factors we have already examined, we can now turn our attention to theory testing. Let's get started by matching some of the variables in Wave VII of the NYS to the ideas contained in social disorganization theory. This task involved culling through the codebook to find variables that I thought reflected Shaw and McKay's ideas, then including them in the NYSCRIME datafile so you could experiment with them.

Shaw and McKay focused on indicators of social decay, such as a high unemployment rate. They were also interested in physical neighborhood descriptors. While not providing factual data on social decay or crime rates, the NYS survey did ask questions that can address both types of measures. In one section of the survey, respondents were asked to rate how much of a problem abandoned houses and run-down buildings were in their own neighborhoods. The respondents were also asked how much of a problem high unemployment was in their neighborhoods. We'll soon see how all three of these measures affect crime.

Now, to measure crime. Once again, the NYS did not collect actual crime rates, but it did ask respondents how much of a problem several crimes were in their neighborhoods. Among the list were two items we will examine: burglaries/thefts and assaults/muggings. We will look at burglaries first, leaving assaults/muggings for you to look at for the "further exploration" questions.

Before testing the theory, run a frequency table for our variables: UNEMP, ABANDON, RUN_DOWN, and BURGLARY.

 UNEMP Y7_60: NEIGH PROB-HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT

		Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Not a problem		771	56.0	56.0
Somewhat of a proble		431	31.3	87.2
Big problem		176	12.8	100.0
	Total	1382	100.0	100.0

Valid cases 1378 Missing cases 4

 ABANDON y7_67: NEIGH PROB-ABANDONED HOUSES

		Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Not a problem		1190	86.2	86.2
Somewhat of a proble		149	10.8	97.0
Big problem		41	3.0	100.0
	Total	1382	100.0	100.0

Valid cases 1380 Missing cases 2

 RUN_DOWN y7_71: NEIGH PROB-RUN DOWN BUILDINGS

		Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Not a problem		1012	73.3	73.3
Somewhat of a proble		293	21.2	94.6
Big problem		75	5.4	100.0
	Total	1382	100.0	100.0

Valid cases 1380 Missing cases 2

BURGLARY y7_69: NEIGH PROB-BURGLARIES/THEFTS

	Frequency	Percent	Cum Percent
Not a problem	764	55.4	55.4
Somewhat of a proble	503	36.4	91.8
Big problem	113	8.2	100.0
Total	1382	100.0	100.0

Valid cases 1380 Missing cases 2

From the frequency tables, we can see that a few of the categories are small, but they may be large enough to work with statistically. Due to the way the set of variables is coded, we really do not want to recode them unless we have to because we will lose the detail that is currently present. If our individual cell sizes get too small, we'll have to recode them. Since everything looks okay for now, let's go on to our theory testing.

EXPLORING SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION THEORY WITH CROSSTABULATION TABLES

We will be running three crosstabulation tables that examine the effects of social disorganization on burglary rates: UNEMP --> BURGLARY, ABANDON --> BURGLARY, and RUN_DOWN --> BURGLARY. The tables appear below:

BURGLARY y7_69: NEIGH PROB-BURGLARIES/THEFTS
by ABANDON y7_67: NEIGH PROB-ABANDONED HOUSES

		ABANDON			
Count		Not a pr	Somewhat	Big prob	Row
Col Pct		oblem	of a pr	lem	Total
		1	2	3	
BURGLARY					
Not a problem	1	733 61.6	30 20.1	1 2.4	764 55.4
Somewhat of a pr	2	403 33.9	81 54.4	19 46.3	503 36.4
Big problem	3	54 4.5	38 25.5	21 51.2	113 8.2
Column		1190	149	41	1380
Total		86.2	10.8	3.0	100.0

Statistic	Value	Approximate Significance
Cramer's V	.29826	.00000
Number of Missing Observations:	2	

BURGLARY y7_69: NEIGH PROB-BURGLARIES/THEFTS
by RUN_DOWN y7_71: NEIGH PROB-RUN DOWN BUILDINGS

		RUN_DOWN			
Count		Not a pr	Somewhat	Big prob	Row
Col Pct		oblem	of a pr	blem	Total
		1	2	3	
BURGLARY					
Not a problem	1	659 65.1	101 34.5	4 5.3	764 55.4
Somewhat of a pr	2	322 31.8	140 47.8	41 54.7	503 36.4
Big problem	3	31 3.1	52 17.7	30 40.0	113 8.2
Column Total		1012 73.3	293 21.2	75 5.4	1380 100.0

Statistic	Value	Approximate Significance
Cramer's V	.30417	.00000
Number of Missing Observations:	2	

BURGLARY y7_69: NEIGH PROB-BURGLARIES/THEFTS
by UNEMP Y7_60: NEIGH PROB-HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT

		UNEMP			
Count		Not a pr	Somewhat	Big prob	Row
Col Pct		oblem	of a pr	blem	Total
		1	2	3	
BURGLARY					
Not a problem	1	518 67.2	196 45.5	49 27.8	763 55.4
Somewhat of a pr	2	242 31.4	186 43.2	75 42.6	503 36.5
Big problem	3	11 1.4	49 11.4	52 29.5	112 8.1
Column Total		771 56.0	431 31.3	176 12.8	1378 100.0

Statistic	Value	Approximate Significance
Cramer's V	.27683	.00000
Number of Missing Observations:	4	

Looking at the tables, what do you see? It appears that burglaries/thefts were a big problem in neighborhoods that were described as having high unemployment rates. Similarly, burglaries/thefts seem to be a problem in areas described as having a large number of abandoned houses. By now it should come as no surprise that burglaries/thefts were more of a problem in areas described as having many run down buildings. Social disorganization appears to have at least some effects on neighborhood crime problems.

FURTHER EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION THEORY

We have now looked at the effects of social disorganization indicators on burglaries/thefts. Shaw and McKay felt their theory explained many types of crime, so you will apply the theory to assaults/muggings for the "further exploration" questions.

SOCIAL DISORGANIZATION THEORY ON YOUR OWN

After exploring social disorganization theory, you may have some interest in finding out whether the social decay indicators are related to the respondents' own levels of criminality. For example, do the three factors we included have any predictive power when considering the respondents' marijuana smoking during the past year? What about their likelihoods of having been involved in violence or of stealing something worth \$50.00 or more? You could also expand your list of social disorganization indicators to include other factors, such as the rate of vandalism (VANDAL) or the number of winos/junkies (WINOS) in the respondents' neighborhoods. Explore to your heart's content.

While you are examining social disorganization theory in depth, reflect on the how it helps us explain why some people break the law. Think also about crimes and/or situations that it cannot adequately address and other weaknesses of the theory. Due to the inability of any one theory to explain all crimes by all offenders, new theories are continuously developed and tested. Maybe you'll develop a new theory during this course...

References

Elliott, D. (1996). National Youth Survey [United States]: Wave VII, 1987 [Computer file]. ICPSR version. Boulder, CO: Behavioral Research Institute [producer], 1995. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 1996.

[PLEASE DO NOT TURN IN THESE PRECEDING SHEETS WITH YOUR ASSIGNMENT- THEY ARE FOR YOU TO KEEP]

Homework for MicroCase #3: General questions
(social disorganization theory)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Answer the following questions by filling in the blanks or circling the appropriate responses. A couple of answers have been filled in for you to make sure you're on the right track.

Exploring social disorganization theory: Getting a handle on the data:

1. Complete the following table using percentages from the frequency tables for UNEMP, ABANDON, RUN_DOWN and BURGLARY:

Issue	% of respondents who felt the issue was not a problem, somewhat of a problem, or a big problem in their neighborhoods		
	Not a problem	somewhat of a problem	a big problem
high unemployment	56.0%		
abandoned houses			
run down buildings			
burglaries/thefts			

- 1b. Looking at this table, what can you say about the three indicators of social disorganization? Are they common in the neighborhoods in the dataset? How common do you think indicators of social disorganization are in the typical neighborhood?

Exploring the correlates of crime with crosstabulation tables:

1. In the UNEMP --> BURGLARY crosstabulation, 52 (____%) of the respondents who said unemployment was a big problem in their neighborhoods also said that burglaries/thefts were a big problem, compared to 49 (____%) who felt unemployment was somewhat of a problem, and ____ (____%) who felt that unemployment was not a problem. Conversely, 518 (____%) of those who felt that unemployment was not a problem in their neighborhoods

said that burglaries/thefts were also not a problem, compared to ____ (____%) who felt unemployment was somewhat of a problem, and ____ (____%) who felt that unemployment was a big problem. Overall, it appears that as unemployment becomes more of a problem in a neighborhood, burglaries/thefts go *up / down*. This relationship is *weak / moderate / strong*. This relationship *is / is not* statistically significant.

The relationship between unemployment level in a neighborhood and crime (as measured by burglaries/thefts) found using Wave VII of the NYS data *is similar to / differs greatly from* the findings expected under social disorganization theory.

- 1b. Briefly explain this finding using social disorganization theory.
2. In the ABANDON --> BURGLARY crosstabulation, 21 (____%) of the respondents who said abandoned houses were a big problem in their neighborhoods also said that burglaries/thefts were a big problem, compared to ____ (____%) who felt abandoned buildings were somewhat of a problem, and ____ (____%) who felt that abandoned buildings were not a problem. Conversely, 733 (____%) of those who felt that abandoned houses were not a problem in their neighborhoods said that burglaries/thefts were also not a problem, compared to ____ (____%) who felt abandoned building were somewhat of a problem, and ____ (____%) who felt that abandoned buildings were a big problem. Overall, it appears that as abandoned houses become more of a problem in a neighborhood, burglaries/thefts go *up / down*. This relationship is *weak / moderate / strong*. This relationship *is / is not* statistically significant.

The relationship between the prevalence of abandoned houses in a neighborhood and crime (as measured by burglaries/thefts) found using Wave VII of the NYS data *is similar to / differs*

greatly from the findings expected under social disorganization theory.

2b. Briefly explain this finding using social disorganization theory.

3. In the RUN_DOWN --> BURGLARY crosstabulation, 30 (____%) of the respondents who said run down buildings were a big problem in their neighborhoods also said that burglaries/thefts were a big problem, compared to ____ (____%) who felt run down buildings were somewhat of a problem, and ____ (____%) who felt that run down buildings were not a problem. Conversely, 659 (____%) of those who felt that run down buildings were not a problem in their neighborhoods said that burglaries/thefts were also not a problem, compared to ____ (____%) who felt run down buildings were somewhat of a problem, and ____ (____%) who felt that run down buildings were a big problem. Overall, it appears that as run down buildings become more of a problem in a neighborhood, burglaries/thefts *go up / down*. This relationship is *weak / moderate / strong*. This relationship *is / is not* statistically significant.

The relationship between the prevalence of run down buildings in a neighborhood and crime (as measured by burglaries/thefts) found using Wave VII of the NYS data *is similar to / differs greatly from* the findings expected under social disorganization theory.

3b. Briefly explain this finding using social disorganization theory.

4. Overall, we can say that our findings for BURGLARY *do / do not* support social

disorganization theory.

5. What does all of this mean? Please answer in essay form, summarizing what you have learned about social disorganization theory from this part of the MicroCase.

Homework for MicroCase #3: "Further exploration" questions
(social disorganization theory)

Name: _____

Date: _____

TASK: Run the analyses we ran above (for BURGLARY), but with MUGGING as the dependent variable.

Answer the following questions by filling in the blanks or circling the appropriate responses. A couple of answers have been filled in for you to make sure you're on the right track.

Further exploration of social disorganization theory:

1. In Wave VII of the NYS dataset, _____% of the sample said assaults/muggings were a big problem in their neighborhoods, _____% felt they were somewhat of a problem, and _____% felt they were not a problem.

1b. Looking at this table, what can you say about the distribution of assaults/muggings? Are they common in the neighborhoods in the dataset? Why wouldn't we expect them to be common?

2. In the UNEMP --> MUGGING crosstabulation, _____ (____%) of the respondents who said unemployment was a big problem in their neighborhoods also said that assaults/muggings were a big problem, compared to 16 (____%) who felt unemployment was somewhat of a problem, and _____ (____%) who felt that unemployment was not a problem. Conversely, 711 (____%) of those who felt that unemployment was not a problem in their neighborhoods said that assaults/muggings were also not a problem, compared to _____ (____%) who felt unemployment was somewhat of a problem, and _____ (____%) who felt that unemployment was a big problem. Overall, it appears that as unemployment becomes more of a problem in a neighborhood, assaults/muggings go *up* / *down*. This relationship is *weak* / *moderate* / *strong*. This relationship *is* / *is not* statistically significant.

The relationship between unemployment level in a neighborhood and crime (as measured by

assaults/muggings) found using Wave VII of the NYS data *is similar to / differs greatly from* the findings expected under social disorganization theory.

2b. Briefly explain this finding using social disorganization theory.

3. In the ABANDON --> MUGGING crosstabulation, 15 (____%) of the respondents who said abandoned houses were a big problem in their neighborhoods also said that assaults/muggings were a big problem, compared to ____ (____%) who felt abandoned buildings were somewhat of a problem, and ____ (____%) who felt that a abandoned buildings were not a problem. Conversely, 1050 (____%) of those who felt that abandoned houses were not a problem in their neighborhoods said that assaults/muggings were also not a problem, compared to ____ (____%) who felt abandoned buildings were somewhat of a problem, and ____ (____%) who felt that abandoned buildings were a big problem. Overall, it appears that as abandoned houses become more of a problem in a neighborhood, assaults/muggings go *up / down*. This relationship is *weak / moderate / strong*. This relationship *is / is not* statistically significant.

The relationship between the prevalence of abandoned houses in a neighborhood and crime (as measured by assaults/muggings) found using Wave VII of the NYS data *is similar to / differs greatly from* the findings expected under social disorganization theory.

3b. Briefly explain this finding using social disorganization theory.

4. In the RUN_DOWN --> MUGGING crosstabulation, 21 (____%) of the respondents who said run down buildings were a big problem in their neighborhoods also said that assaults/muggings were a big problem, compared to ____ (____%) who felt run down buildings were somewhat of a problem, and ____ (____%) who felt that run down buildings

6. What does all of this mean? Please answer in essay form, summarizing what you have learned about social disorganization theory from this part of the MicroCase.

Affirmation of Independent Work

Submission of this assignment constitutes a statement on your part that apart from technical help, you completed this assignment on your own. Plagiarism will be reported to University authorities and can result in expulsion from the University.

Your Name: _____ Signature: _____

Homework for MicroCase #3: "On your own" questions
(disorganization theory)

Name: _____

Date: _____

TASK: Run the analyses we ran in the text, using USED MJ, THEFT50 or VIOLENCE as the dependent variable (instead of whether crimes are a problem in the respondents' neighborhoods).

Directions: Answer the following questions. NOTE: Please print out and include your tables with these questions so your work can be graded.

Social disorganization theory on your own:

1. Which variable did you select as a dependent variable?
2. Why did you select that variable?
3. How did UNEMP affect your dependent variable? Make sure to provide a description that includes the percentages, Cramer's V value, the strength of the relationship, and the significance value.
4. How did ABANDON and RUN_DOWN affect your dependent variable? Make sure to provide a description that includes the percentages, Cramer's V value, the strength of the relationship, and the significance value.

If you wish to do more exploring on your own, try to expand your list of social decay indicators to include other factors (e.g., VANDAL or WINOS). You may use the back of this sheet to discuss the independent variables you chose and how they affected your dependent variable(s).