

OPPORTUNITY THEORY, ROUTINE ACTIVITY THEORY, AND CRIMINAL EVENT THEORY

Enter the Victimization Surveys

- Life-style exposure, opportunity and routine activities theory evolved in the 1960's and 1970's when victimization surveys started to gain popularity.
- Victimization surveys tried to figure out who was being victimized, who was doing the victimization, where and when the victimization occurred.

Rising Crime Rates

- Also a time when crime rates were rising dramatically and victims were demanding the government to take action to protect them.

Happy Together

- Victimology, opportunity theory, routine lifestyle exposure, etc., are all quite similar.
- All tend to view criminal event in terms of time-space cont. and examine ways in which offenders and victims intersect in time and space in the absence of a capable guardian.

Lifestyle Exposure Theory

- Introduced in 1978 by Hindelang, Gottfredson and Garofalo
- Same Gottfredson who co-authored "A General Theory of Crime" with Travis Hirschi.

Lifestyle Exposure Theory cont.

- Lifestyles of individuals and groups follow certain patterns. For example, where they go, what time, who they go with, and what they do when they get there.
- Offenders don't select victims at random, they follow similar lifestyle patterns to their victims and often resemble them in age, social class, gender and/or ethnic origin.

Eight (Indecent) Propositions

- The more time you spend (esp. at night) the more likely you are to become a victim.
- Lifestyle choices influence the likelihood that you will spend more/less time in a public place.
- People interact with other people who often share similar lifestyles.
- The chances are higher of being victimized by someone who has the same demographic profile in terms of age, social background, etc.

Eight Propositions cont.

- Lifestyle choices influence the amount of time they spend with family and non-family members.
- The chances of becoming a victim of crime increase with the amount you spend with non-family members.
- Lifestyle choices (or differences) influence your ability to isolate yourself from offenders.
- Variations in your lifestyle can influence how convenient and easy it is to victimize you.

Some Supporting Evidence

- 2004 GSS found that rates of violent victimization between ages 15-24, lowest for those over 65.
- Young people more likely to engage in public activities during the evening, when old people were likely to spend their evenings at home or at a low-risk environment.

Supporting Evidence cont.

- Rates of violent victimization much higher for individuals who were single, separated or divorced, more frequently engaged in outside activities outside of home.

Routine Activity Theory (aka RAT)

- Introduced in 1979 by Lawrence Cohen & Marcus Felson
- Similar to lifestyle exposure theory- came out roughly at the same time, both based of victimization surveys.
- Three main elements required
 1. Motivated offender
 2. Suitable target
 3. Absence of a capable guardian.

Working on the Chain Gang

- Husbands, wives and teenagers working.
- Traveling to and from work.
- Leaving home and personal effects unprotected.

Reading, Riting And Rithmetic

- More people going to schools.
- More schools to go to.
- More time spent in school.

Shop 'til You Drop

- Food
- Fashion
- Functional items
- Fun

Recreational Activities

Economic Prosperity – more items to steal.

Advances in RAT and Victimology

- Cohen, Kluegel and Land's work on social inequality and victimization
- Miethe and Meier's structural choice model of victimization
- Marcus Felson's concept of the Metroreef.

Social Inequality and Victimization

- Cohen, Kluegel & Land (1981) agree that target attractiveness and the presence of guardians are contributing factors in the criminal event.
- Also argue that most property crime is motivated by desire for economic gain – not because of the thrill or because the opportunity presents itself.

Social Inequality and Victimization cont.

- Suggest that income levels do have a measurable effect on crime.
- Unemployed or lower income individuals living in urban centres are at the greatest risk of victimization.
- Higher income individuals able to avoid victimization by reducing their exposure to offenders through enhanced guardianship measures.

The Structural Choice Model of Victimization

- Miethe & Meier's structural choice model of victimization builds on Cohen, Kluegel and Land's work.
- Acknowledges impact of socio-economic inequality in shaping the criminal event.
- Structural model also attempts to explain criminal event on a macro scale, by integrating a number of different theoretical perspectives.

A Structural (Macro) Model of the Criminal Event

Marcus Felson's Metroreef

"Divergent metropolis" refers to Metropolitan areas that sprawl into seemingly endless suburbs.

The Four Main Features of the Metroreef

- **DISPERSION OF CONSTRUCTION-** more single family homes, low rise buildings on large lots, areas with large parking lots.
- **PROLIFERATING HOUSEHOLDS-** more elderly people living on their own, young people moving out and setting up their own households.
- **SPREADING OF PEOPLE OVER MANY VEHICLES-** more people have their own cars.
- **DISPERSING ACTIVITIES AWAY FROM HOME-** people go further to work, shop and play.

Criminal Event Theory

- **Examines the precursors, transactions and aftermaths of criminal events.**
- **Examines the settings in which criminal events take place.**

Crimes as Social Events

- **Criminal event theory says crimes should be viewed as social events.**
- **Involve people interacting with each other offenders, witnesses, and criminal justice personnel.**
- **Referred to as events (or episodes) because they have a beginning and an end.**

The "Typical" Offender

- **Most offenders are young males aged 15-24, usually lower socioeconomic status, unemployed or temporarily employed.**
- **15-24 age group represented only 14% of population in 2003 while accounting for 45% of violent crime and 32% of property crime.**

Feelings Of Guilt

- **Offender may agree the act was wrong but say they didn't do it -> "techniques of neutralization"**
- **Offenders do experience feelings of guilt and find it is necessary to rationalize/justify their behaviors.**

Victim Characteristics

Victim Characteristics cont.

- Individuals most likely to be victimized are young males aged 15-24 who are poor and/or from ethnic minorities.
- People over 65 years of age are least likely to be victimized.
- Relatively little difference between genders in terms of overall risk of personal victimization.

Bystanders & Witnesses

- Bystanders and witnesses may deter or prevent a crime by their presence.
- Offenders may be reluctant to commit a crime in front of witnesses or possible interveners.
- Bystanders and witnesses may prevent a crime from escalating by breaking up a fight or call the police.

Bystanders & Witnesses cont.

- **BYSTANDERS MAY ALSO FACILITATE CRIME:**
 1. Encouraging a fight or vandalize a property.
 2. Participating in a group that witnesses and encourages a sexual assault.

The Police

Police often have direct influence on whether or not an act becomes regarded as a criminal event.

May let someone off with warning if they come from a 'good family,' yet arrest someone who does the same thing because they are "street kids."

The Police cont.

- If police are engaged in proactive policing, there is a higher likelihood of an act being defined as criminal.
- If engaged in reactive policing then fewer acts are less likely to be defined as crimes.

The Kansas City Experiment

- 1972-1973 study in Kansas City.
- Tested proactive, reactive and control responses to police activity.
- Surveyed 15 beats – 5 proactive, 5 reactive, 5 control.
- 40% or more of police officers' time is uncommitted.

The Kansas City Experiment cont.

- No statistically significant difference in crime rates over periods of study.
- Lowest crime rate in reactive beats

- No significant increase or decrease in arrest rates between the three groups.
- No significant increase in citizen's perception of crime risks.

The Social Setting

- Crime rates generally higher in urban areas than in rural areas.
- Higher in economically disadvantaged, urban areas with an unstable population.
- Lower in "better off" urban area with a stable population.

The Urban Setting – population density rises, crime rates increase.

The Social Setting cont.

- About 50% of all victimizations take place in or around the homes of victims (or other private residences)
- Roughly 25% take place in commercial settings-> shopping malls, bars, and restaurants-> places of leisure.
- Roughly 25% take place in public places -> parks, streets and parking lots (leisure?)

Killer-Victim Relationship

1. Acquaintance
2. Family
3. Stranger

And Where It Happens

1. Victims residence
2. Open area
3. Other residences
4. Commercial premises
5. Private vehicle
6. Public institution

Hot Spots

- Crime generators, or crime attractors – entertainment districts.
- People usually commit crimes close to places central in their lives -> school, work and home.

Al Maha Desert Resort

American Hot Spots

Hot Dots

- **“Hot Dot” refers to individuals who are victimized repeatedly**
- **People who are victimized once have a higher likelihood of being victimized again.**

How to Become a Hot Dot

- **Victims and victimizers (offenders) may intersect or even live in the same hotspots.**
- **Individuals may at times be victims and at other times be the offenders.**
- **2004 GSS reveals that 40% reported to be victimized multiple times and engaging in ongoing cycles of offending and victimization.**
- **19% victimized at least twice and 20% to be victimized 3x or more.**

Wild and Wet

The Temporal Setting

- **Criminal events also occur at predictable times.**
- **Time of day, day of the week, month, year, and season can all influence criminal activity.**
- **Robbery and assault occur at night.**
- **Personal residences more susceptible B&E during summer months.**

The Three Social Domains

1. **Family household**
2. **Leisure**
3. **Work**

The Fourth Social Domain

4. **School**

The Paths We Travel

Precursors

- **Elements leading up to the criminal event, such as the location and the time.**
- **Did the participants know each other, and if not, how did they intersect in time and space?**

Transactions

- **What transpires between the various participants in the criminal event?**
- **Includes the actions of offenders, victims, bystanders, witnesses and criminal justice personnel.**
- **Did their actions and interactions contribute to the event, accelerate or diffuse the event.**

The Aftermath

- **Reactions of the police and the criminal justice system, the harm to the victim and the punishment received by the offender.**