

Institutional isolation and crime: The mediating effect of disengaged youth on levels of crime.

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Institutional isolation and crime: The mediating effect of disengaged youth on levels of crime.

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Source

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Abstract

We propose that structural resource deprivation and a weak civic participatory culture foster institutional isolation among youth, which, in turn, elevates rates of crime. Robust institutional attachments are essential to mainstream cultural learning, the internalization of mainstream values, the development of local network ties, and pro-social behavior. Communities that fail to embed residents, particularly youth, within a conventional institutional framework are ill-equipped for concerted action and unable to defend community interest and solve common problems, including crime. Using county-level census data we identify a group of youth who are simultaneously disengaged from a wide swath of mainstream social institutions, those we term "floaters." Analyses of aggregate levels of homicide, aggravated assault, robbery, and burglary around 2000 offer strong support for a mediation model indicating that structural deprivation and a weak civic participatory culture increase the presence of floaters which, in turn, raises levels of violent and property crime. We discuss the implications of our findings.

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KEYWORDS:

Disengaged youth, Floaters, Mediation, Social isolation

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