

Police Protection by Neighborhood

As you can see, the research possibilities are almost limitless with the wealth of data already made available to researchers interested in issues of criminology and criminal justice. Using UCR data on the number of police officers and civilians employed within specific jurisdictions, David Thacher (2011) recently examined whether the racial/ethnic distribution and its socioeconomic status influenced the degree to which a jurisdiction was protected by these resources. To answer his question, Thacher matched the UCR police data with U.S. Census data. He stated,

With these data on police strength and the composition of the population served by each agency, I am able to describe the distribution of policing by race and class in the same way that the educational literature has analyzed the distribution of educational resources. (Thacher, 2011, p. 283)

To measure poverty, he created a measure called the Concentration Index (CI), which was actually a measure of income inequality. Thacher (2011) found that when police strength was measured as the number of police employees per crime, it varied substantially between rich and poor areas (see Exhibit 9.1 for comparative results). For example, wealthier jurisdictions tended to have significantly more police employees per 100 index crimes compared to poorer areas. This finding runs counter to the contention that cities generally allocate police resources equitably. Thacher (2011) states, “police protection has become more concentrated in the most advantaged communities—those with the highest per-capita incomes and the largest share of white residents” (p. 286). What has changed, Thacher believes, is the crime rates. For example, when police protection per capita (number of individuals in jurisdiction) is examined, police protection has not changed much since 1970 across jurisdictions. However, because crime became more concentrated in the poorest communities during that time, police resources per crime have become less egalitarian. What does this mean in the real world?

The result is a growing workload disparity between rich and poor jurisdictions. In rich jurisdictions, each police officer has responsibility for fewer and fewer crimes over time, while in poor jurisdictions this part of the police workload has either remained constant or grown. (Thacher, 2011, p. 289)
