Explaining Crime Variations Across the City: Methodologies for Capturing Socially Cohesive Neighbourhood Processes

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Theoretical Background

1. Collective Efficacy
   - Population heterogeneity
   - Population turnover
   - Social deprivation
   - Macro-level aggregates correlated with crime rates
   - Sampson et al. (1997) explanatory mechanism. Neighbourhood social cohesion enhances social control

2. Area Crime Rates
   - Typically measured through community surveys which tap into perceptions of what your neighbours would do.
   - Key question: Can a static measure capture a dynamic process?

Methodology

2. Using ‘lost’ letters to test levels of neighbourhood social cohesion.
   - Each envelope contains a code specific to location dropped.
   - Neighbourhoods sampled using Collective Efficacy survey data (Wikström et al., 2012) to assess variation across a range of pre-existing neighbourhood measures.

3. Findings and Implications
   - Overall... 73% ...of letters ‘lost’ were returned.
   - Collective Efficacy survey measures explained... 34% ...of return variance.
   - Distance to post box, street design, and weather conditions of no significance.

- Does altruism explain other variances relevant to crime?

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- Percentage return rate per Collective Efficacy Survey score cluster
  - 62.6%
  - 69.3%
  - 64.0%
  - 81.3%
  - 90.6%
  - Significant difference
  - Threshold Effect

- Boosting social cohesion is often mooted as a policy prescription to help neighbourhoods reduce crime
- But policy responses need a more direct measure of control, not a perception of it
- Lost letters provide policy makers with a dynamic measure of action by:
  - (1) Negating low response rates of community surveys to take baseline levels of cohesion
  - (2) Specifying and testing the social processes occurring within neighbourhoods of relevance to crime