

## Guest Editorial

Miles Hewstone, University of Oxford, UK  
Douglas S. Massey, Princeton University, USA

The study of neighbourhoods is well and truly on the research agenda of social and behavioural scientists, including anthropologists, criminologists, demographers, economists, political scientists, psychologists, and sociologists. This research activity has emphasized not only that neighbourhoods matter, but that their study raises a number of specific theoretical and methodological issues, which require a sophisticated and eclectic approach if we are to approach a full understanding of myriad 'neighbourhood effects'. In this Special Issue of the International Journal of Conflict and Violence we focus specifically on neighbourhood effects on violence, studied in a rich array of contexts.

The first two articles make use of extensive survey data available from the United States of America. Ami M. Lynch's article uses nationwide data on U.S. cities and their residential segregation levels (Lynch 2008). There is an extensive literature on the consequences of racial segregation, but her paper focuses on whether hate crime and neighbourhood conflict are important factors in perpetuating residential segregation. Using sophisticated statistical analyses, she concludes that they indeed are. As hate crime increases, white/black segregation increases; thus race-based violence influences where racial minorities can and cannot live, and is used by some majority group members as a way to defend their neighbourhoods from 'racial infiltration'.

David J. Harding (2008) analyses survey data from a national study of adolescent health in the U.S. to examine the relationship between neighbourhood violence and adolescent friendships. Using complex multi-level models, he reports no evidence that violence and the fear of victimization systematically impact on the closeness of adolescent friendships for boys or girls. But, more subtly, and especially for boys, these factors are associated with friendships outside of school, probably with older individuals, which can help them to stay safe.

The next two articles each focus, albeit on very different research questions and in very different ways, on aspects of violence in one specific city. Katharina Schmid and colleagues investigate the impact on ethno-religious prejudice of living in segregated and mixed neighborhoods in Belfast, Northern Ireland (Schmid et al. 2008). Using adult data from a cross-sectional survey, they report that living in mixed neighborhoods was associated with reduced ingroup bias and fewer offensive action tendencies. These effects were partially mediated by positive intergroup contact. However, their analysis also shows that respondents living in mixed neighborhoods also reported higher exposure to political violence and higher perceived threat to physical safety. These findings demonstrate the importance of examining both social experience and threat perceptions when testing the relationship between social environment and prejudice.

Celina Del Felice's article describes and analyses youth criminality in the city of Rosario, Argentina, and includes an analysis of direct, structural, and cultural forms of violence (Del Felice 2008). She draws on a range of qualitative approaches (including observations, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of policy documents) to consider how the structural adjustment policies imposed in many Latin American economies during the 1990s affected levels of public violence. She highlights the link between social, political and economic exclusion and crime involving urban youth (with some violent offenders as young as 8 years).

The last two papers in this Special Issue address somewhat more subtle, perhaps even unexpected, effects of neighbourhood violence. Netsayi M. Mudege and colleagues – using data from two slum areas of Nairobi, Kenya – assess how perceptions of personal security can affect whether children are registered for and attend school (Mudege et al. 2008). Feelings of insecurity can arise in relation to the journey that must be undertaken to get to school (where girls sometimes fear rape), what goes on at school itself (including relations with both teachers and other students), and in their homes. Qualitative data gleaned from individual interviews and focus groups reveal the negative impact of insecure neighbourhoods on whether schooling is taken up, and whether students complete schooling, or drop out.

Finally, Emily Moiduddin and her coauthor investigate the effect of neighbourhood violence on the birth weight of newborns (Moiduddin/Massey 2008). Using data from a large-scale survey of a birth cohort of parents and children in 20 U. S. cities, they report that the effect of structural neighbourhood conditions on birth outcomes is not, however, direct. Rather, it occurs via their immediate effect on mothers' perceptions of neighbourhood danger. Mothers who live in an unsafe neighbourhood are more likely at risk of a raised allostatic load, and are more likely to smoke cigarettes and use illegal drugs as coping devices; these behaviours themselves were strongly associated with reduced birth weight.

As a whole, these six articles address a range of social and psychological consequences of neighbourhood violence. Some analyse data from large, multi-site surveys, others focus in on one specific city. They start from a variety of theoretical approaches, and employ a wide range of methodologies, from survey methods using sophisticated multivariate analyses, to more qualitative approaches, which emphasize different experiences and interpretations of violence. They also embrace cities in both the developing and developed world. One common theme is that the magnitude of neighbourhood effects may not always be large, and effects are sometimes indirect and subtle, rather than direct and obvious. Nonetheless, there clearly are relationships between neighbourhood measures and a variety of types of violence, and these effects have been found in a diverse collection of settings, ranging over several countries and continents. Finally, this collection of articles contains many implications for policy, some explicitly drawn out by authors, some more implicit.

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Miles Hewstone

miles.hewstone@psy.ox.ac.uk

Douglas S. Massey

dmassey@princeton.edu

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