



The Correlation of Poverty and Crime: Testing the Anomie Theory

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Abstract

Crime is a problem in all societies. No society can exist without some deviation from the collective norms. I will be testing Merton's anomie theory which will indicate a gap between the cultural goals of society and the means in which we achieve those goals. Poverty is being looked at as playing a role in the everyday choices and opportunities that people have. My hypothesis is that there is a correlation between poverty and crime.

Correlations will be tested through SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) using data collections from the most current statistics. The United States Census Bureau will provide poverty rates by state and the FBI's UCR (Uniform Crime Report) will provide crime rates by state for various crimes.



Poverty

Relatively, it is the condition of having less resources and/or less income than others within a society or country.

Poverty Rate: The percentage of people below the government poverty line.



Cultural Values

A society's beliefs of how people should act and react.



Merton's Anomie Theory

A discontinuity between cultural goals and a legitimate means in which to reach those goals. In the United States this corners the American Dream as the emphasis for reaching these goals but without a legitimate means to reach them. This cause a good amount of deviance.

Crime

A way from any norm that a society has made a law. Some people are willing to risk the consequences of breaking the law to achieve their goals.



Merton's Social Structure

Merton's typology of individual adaptations to environmental pressures

Type of adaptation	Cultural goal	Institutionalized means
I. Conformity	+	+
II. Innovation	+	-
III. Ritualism	-	+
IV. Retreatism	-	-
V. Rebellion	±	±

Note: + signifies acceptance, - signifies rejection, and ± signifies rejection of prevailing goal or means and substitution of new goal or means.
Source: Adapted from Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1957), p. 150.

- Conformist – accepts institutionalized means
- Innovator – accepts institutionalized goals but rejects legitimate means
- Ritualism – overconformist where institutionalized norms is the end itself
- Retreatism – rejection of cultural goals and institutionalized means
- Rebellion – rejects goals and means of society and tries to replace them

Is there a correlation between poverty and crime?

Hypothesis

- a. States with high poverty rates will have high rates of violent crime.
- b. States with high poverty rates will have high rates of murder.
- c. States with high poverty rates will have high rates of robbery.
- d. States with high poverty rates will have high rates of property crime.
- e. States with high poverty rates will have high rates of burglary.
- f. States with high poverty rates will have high rates of motor vehicle theft.

Results

- a. Violent crime (r=.392, p=.004) low correlation, and statistically significant.
- b. Murder (r=.504, p=.000) moderate correlation, and statistically significant.
- c. Robbery (r=.271, p=.055) little correlation, and not statistically significant.
- d. Property (r=.418, p=.002) low correlation and statistically significant.
- e. Burglary (r=.570, p=.000) moderate correlation and statistically significant.
- f. Motor vehicle theft (r=.231, p=.104) little correlation and not statistically significant.