

**Drug Law Enforcement and Social Disorganization Theory:  
The disruptive effects of the War on Drugs**

*Ruben A. Ortiz, Bridgewater State University*

***Abstract***

The work of Shaw and Mckay (1942) paved the way for researchers to study inner-city crime by focusing on the environment and its effects on residents. Social disorganization, characterized by weakened institutions led researchers to analyze and predict patterns of crime in urban areas. Social disorganization theory arguments developed from this approach, but lost its appeal among researchers due to a lack of empirical tests. The theory experienced a renewed interest in the 1980s, as structural factors (eg. poverty, heterogeneity, residential mobility, racial inequality, and family disruption) are considered antecedents of community level social disorganization, all of which allows researchers to study patterns of crime in large urban areas. The latest argument put forward in the 1990s is that wider macro-structural forces, which Bursik (1989) and Sampson & Wilson (1995) discuss as conscious political decisions, may actually promote structural antecedents that lead to community social disorganization. This study seeks to examine drug law enforcement as a macro structural force which implicates past and current social policy. In other words, policy is conceptualized as an explanatory variable for elements of social disorganization which appears to be absent from the literature. The study uses US cities from the 2000 census with populations of 250,000 or more as the unit of analysis. Results from OLS regression techniques will be used to discuss the study's implication for social disorganization theory and US public policy. Additionally, the study implicates arguments by Quinney (2001) about potential social problems related to police discretion.

---

References

- Bursik, R J. (1989). Political decision-making and ecological models of delinquency; Conflict and consensus. In Messner, S. F., Krohn , M. D., and Liska, A. E. (Eds.), *Theoretical Integration in the Study of Deviance and Crime: Problems and Prospects* (pp. 105-118). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Quinney, R. (2001). *The social reality of crime*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publisher.
- Sampson, R.J., & Wilson, W.J. (1995). Toward a theory of race, crime, and urban inequality. In J. Hagan, & R.D. Peterson (Eds.), *Crime and Inequality*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Shaw, C. R., & McKay, H. D. (1942). *Juvenile delinquency and urban areas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.