
Neighborhoods, Social Interactions and Crime: What Does the Evidence Show?

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Talk Outline

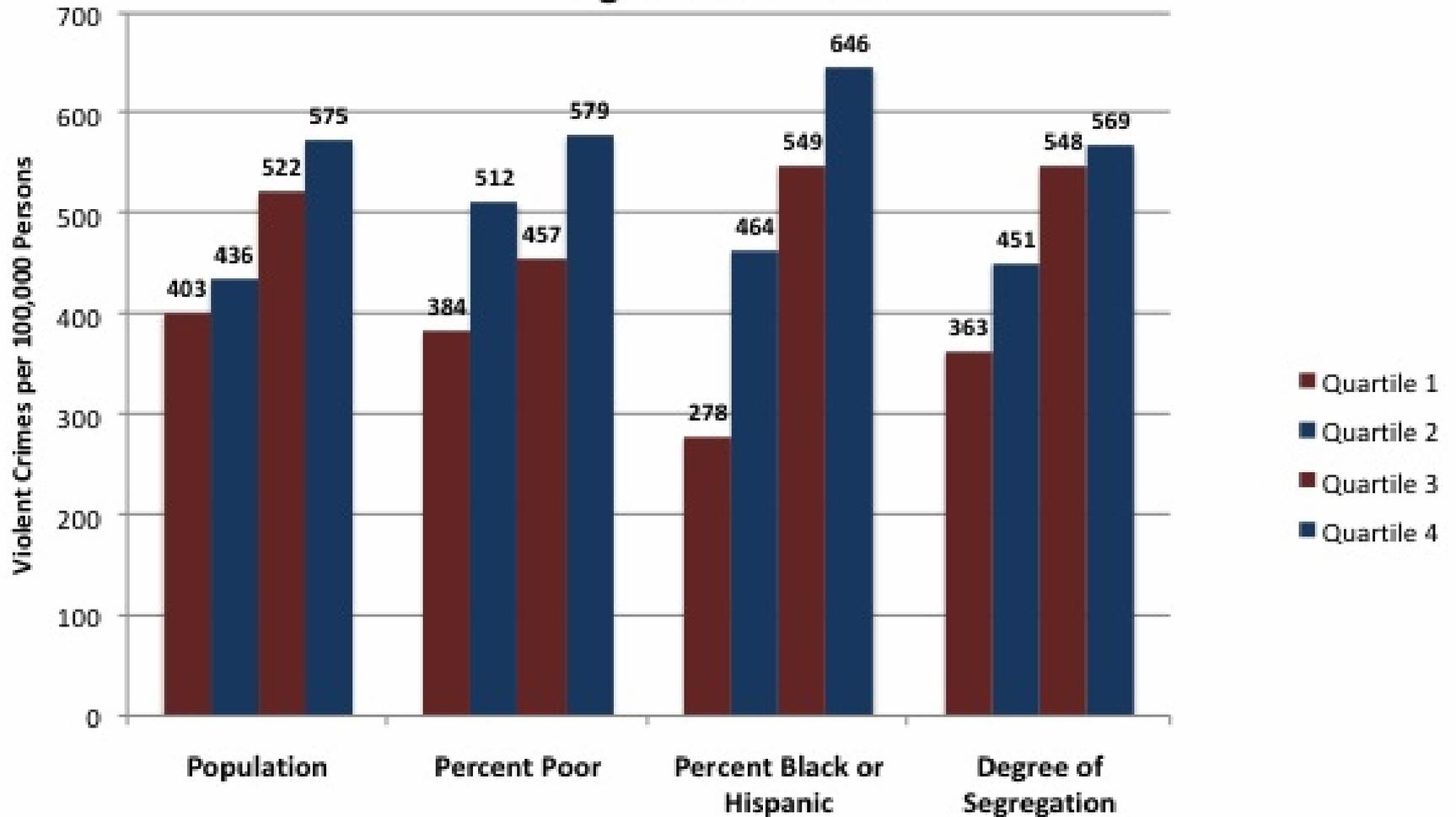
- Evidence on Neighborhood-Crime Connection
 - What are Neighborhoods, and How do we Conceptualize
 - Neighborhood as Place
 - Neighborhood as Social Interactions
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Neighborhood-Crime Connection?

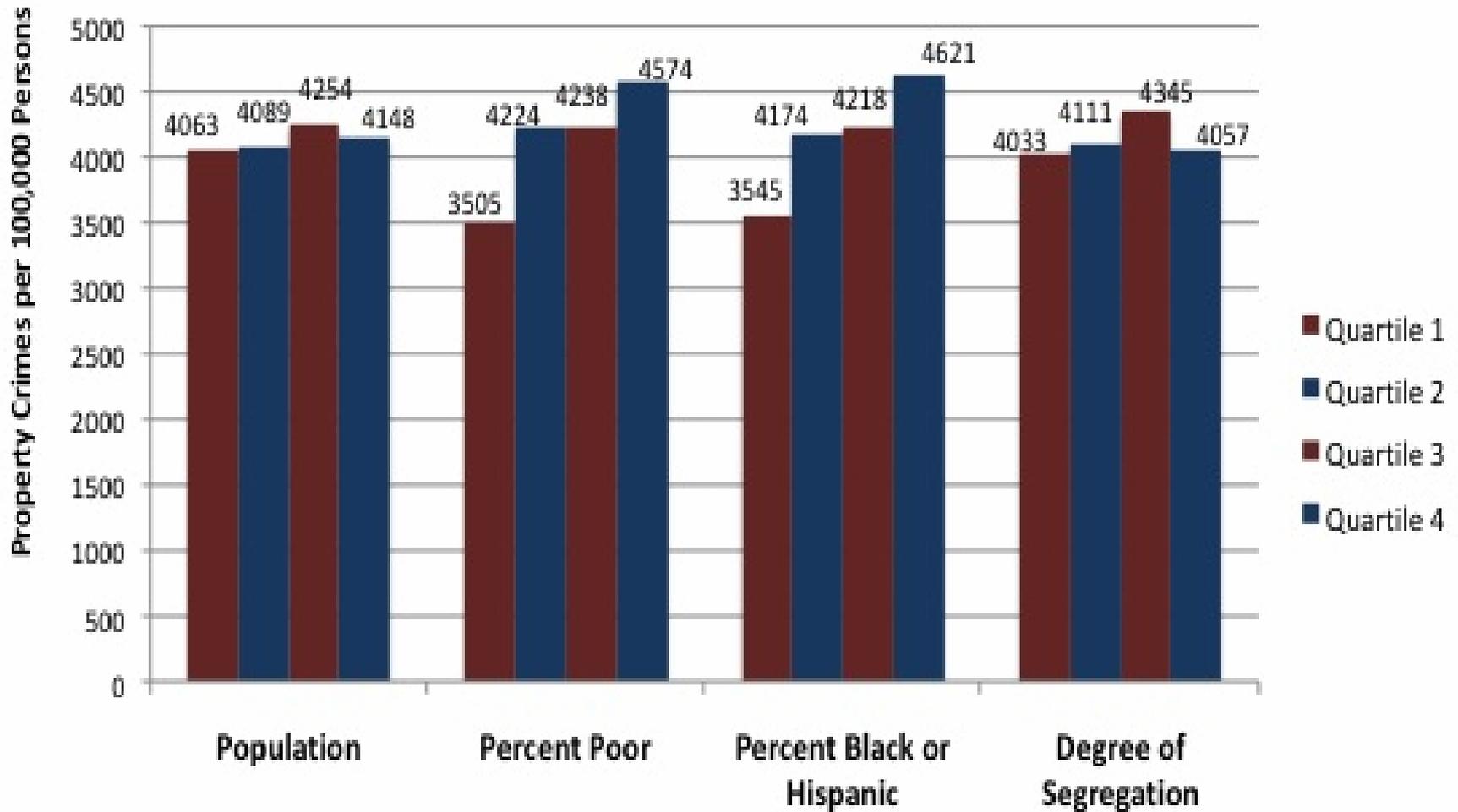
- Demographics and economic characteristics of areas correlate with crime in expected direction – Across Metro Areas



Average Violent Crimes



Average Property Crimes



Neighborhood-Crime Connection?

- Demographics and economic characteristics of areas correlate with crime in expected direction
 - And within metro areas, both violent (and victimization) and property crime rates are higher in urban than suburban or rural areas.
 - Concern: Many dimensions are themselves correlated with one another. Causality?
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Defining Neighborhoods

Spatially Bound Places:

- As physical assets that give value to areas – Economists, Urban Planners, Geographers
 - As locus of social interactions influencing social relationships and community identities – Sociologists, Urban Planners, Geographers
 - Concepts strongly related but imply different mechanisms of influence on crime outcomes
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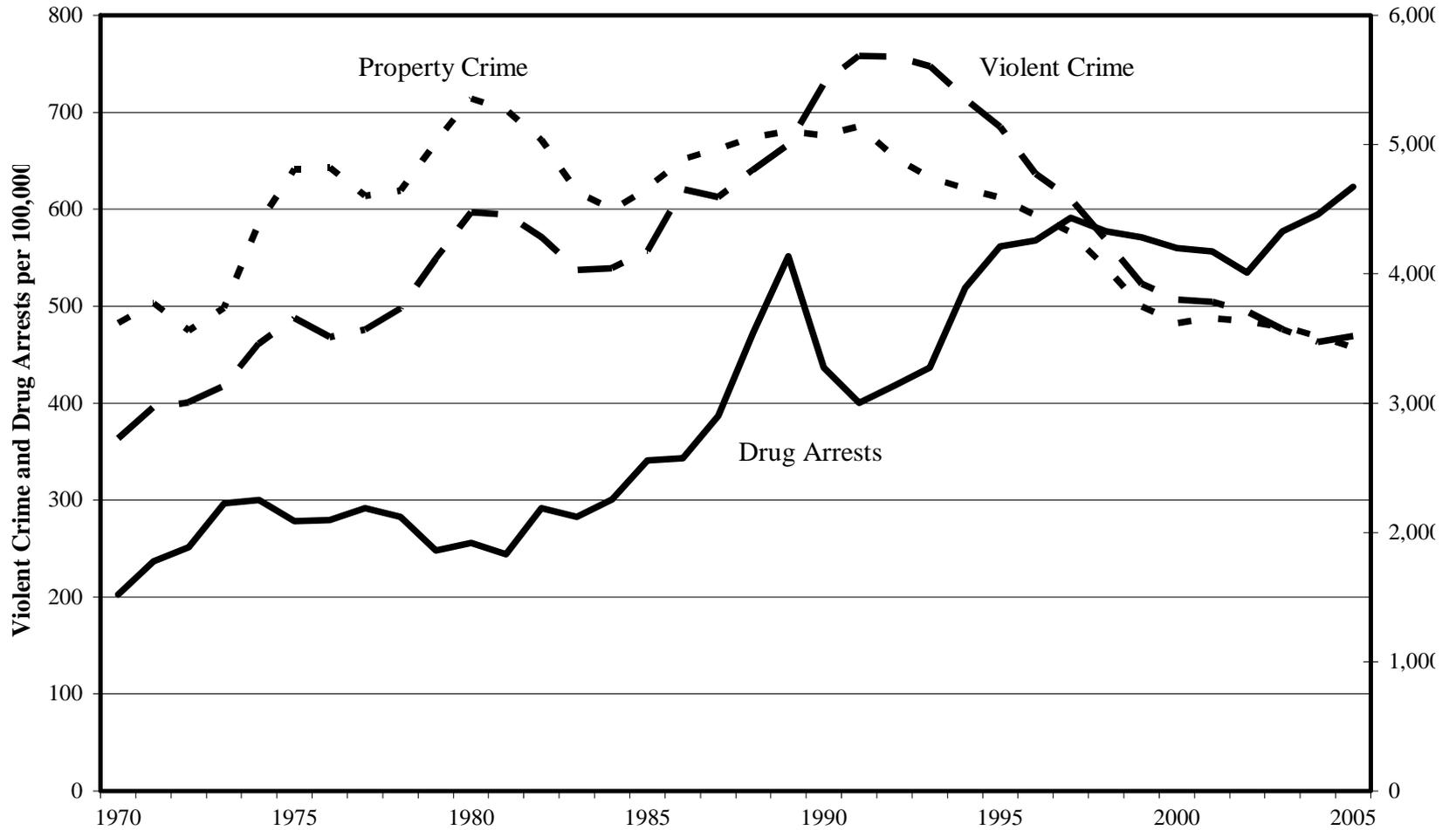
Research Challenges in Identifying Influence of Neighborhoods on Crime

- Causal Effect or Residential Sorting?
 - Chicken or Egg?
 - If causal, what mechanism? Neighborhood as physical assets or as social interactions?
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Neighborhood as Place

- Rational Choice to Crime
 - Decision to participate based on neighborhood incentives/disincentives to crime
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Figure 3
Property and Violent Crime and Drug Arrest Rates, 1970-2005



Source: Author's Calculations from the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

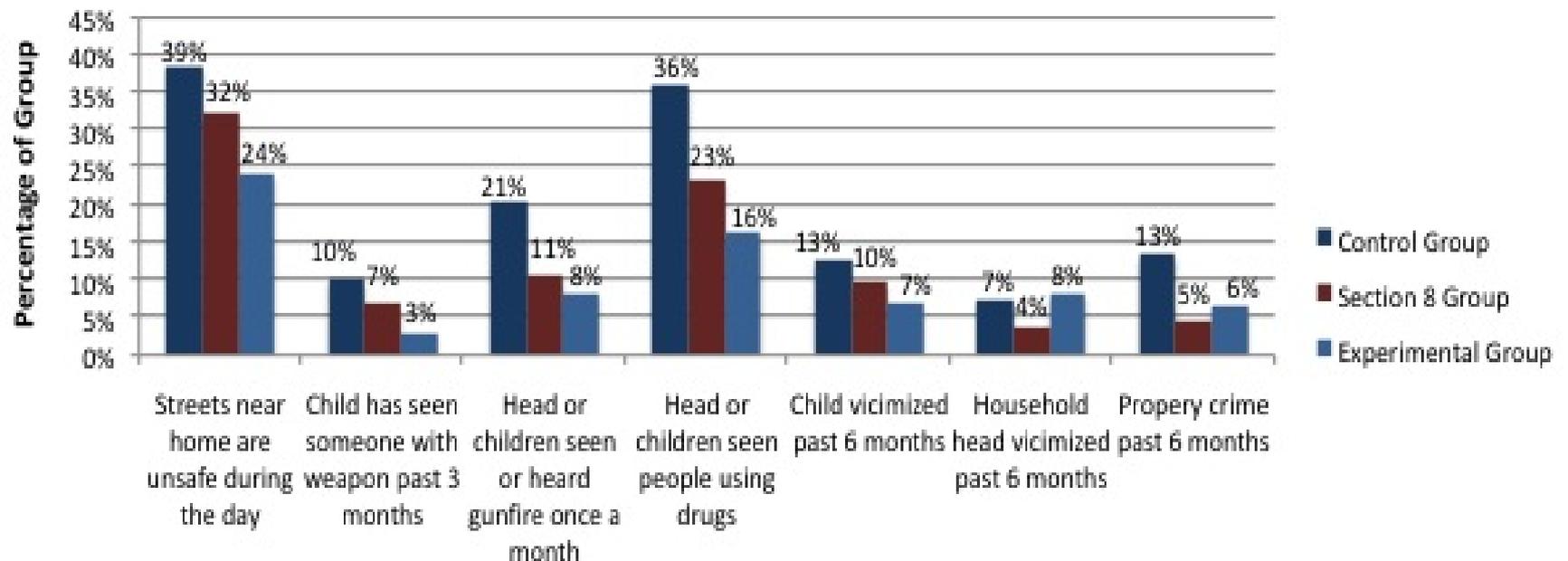
Neighborhood as Place

- Rational Choice to Crime
 - Decision to participate based on neighborhood incentives/disincentives to crime
 - Evidence from research on: local labor markets, neighborhood job access, and collective efficacy, other important institutions like schools, churches, etc.
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Neighborhood as Place – Problem of Selection

- Response: Randomization – MTO
 - Concerns over MTO Results
 - Negative Selection
 - Take up rates
 - Location of move
 - 96th percentile of the poverty distribution to the 88th percentile – But effects likely bigger if moved to neighborhoods with 50th percentile
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Intent-to-Treat Effects of the Moving to Opportunities Program



MTO - Implications

- Important because criminal participation by youth is a big predictor of adult criminal participation.
 - MTO - Example of place but is also consistent with story of social interactions
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Neighborhood as Social Interaction

Sources:

- Peers - Equal standing, belonging to same group
 - Families
 - Network Structure – Density, quality, and type of networks
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Neighborhood as Social Interaction

Bottom Line:

- Interactions could positively or negatively influence participation in crime depending on quality, strength and density of relationships
 - Less attention to questions of causality, especially questions of chicken and egg and sorting
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Conclusions

- Strong evidence of descriptive patterns of neighborhood characteristics and involvement in crime (and victimization)
 - Growing evidence of causal relationship, but stronger for research in neighborhood as place conceptualization
 - Still, a clear need to identify, isolate and measure differing mechanisms that drive neighborhood-crime connection
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Public Policy

- Residential mobility could work but if social interactions drive behavior, little effect of mobility, even if neighborhood assets increase.
 - But if neighborhood as assets matter and we try to improve peers, families, networks, without improving assets such as as community institutions, then little effect.
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