Social change and violence: Regional and remote transformations

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What is the rural crisis?

- Population decline
- Age restructuring
- Economic vulnerability to environmental extremes
- Centralising impact of globalisation
• Rural violent crime rates higher than urban rates

• ‘Very remote’ parts of Queensland are the most violent

Source: OESR, 2001
Research site: Queensland

- Non-metropolitan Queensland

- Excludes:
  - South-east Queensland (Brisbane and adjacent coastal centres)
  - Toowoomba
  - Townsville
  - Cairns
Research questions

- Is social and economic disruption related to fluctuation in violent crime in non-metropolitan Queensland?

- Are some types of violence more susceptible to social and economic disruption than others?

- How can an exploration of ‘extremes’ contribute to understanding this process?
Research design

- Secondary data analysis
  - Queensland Police Service
  - Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
  - Queensland Centre for Population Research
  - National Key Centre for Social Applications of Geographic Information Systems (GISCA)

- SLA unit of analysis ($N=124$)

- Uses data from two time periods; 1996 and 2001
Measuring ‘change’

• Residual change scores
  - Predict the time 2 score from the time 1 score
  - Calculate the difference between the predicted time 2 score, and the actual time 2 score

• Avoid making inferences about systemic change by using measures reflecting stasis
Variables

• Explanatory variables:
  - Ethnic heterogeneity
  - Familial and residential instability
  - Primary industry workforce quotients
  - Age profile
  - Population density
  - Gender balance
  - Indicators of economic status
  - Accessibility/remoteness index of Australia Plus (ARIA+)
  - Settlement zones

• Outcome variables:
  - Homicide-related offences
  - Serious assaults
  - Common assaults
  - Armed robbery
  - Unarmed robbery
  - Menacing person offences
  - Sexual offences
  - Total violent crime
Settlement zones

- Zonings based on:
  - Economic structures and dependencies
  - Age structure
  - Population density and movements

- Each zone has a unique ‘sensitivity to differential demographic and related socioeconomic trends’ (Holmes, Charles-Edwards & Bell, 2005, p.16)
Results

• General trends
  - Violence across Queensland
  - Violence across settlement zones

• Multiple regressions

• Descriptive exploration of ‘extremes’
67 per cent of SLAs across Queensland experienced a larger than predicted decrease in total violence from 1996-2001.
• South-east Queensland
  ➢ 75 per cent of SLAs showed decreases

• Coastal Queensland
  ➢ 67 per cent of SLAs showed decreases

• Agricultural Queensland
  ➢ 74 per cent of SLAs showed decreases

• Pastoral Queensland
  ➢ 58 per cent of SLAs showed decreases

• Remote interior
  ➢ 57 per cent of SLAs showed decreases

• Remote north
  ➢ 40 per cent of SLAs showed decreases
Predicting change across the site

- Significant models
  - Total violent crime
  - Homicide-related offences
  - Serious assaults
  - Menacing person offences
  - Sexual offences

- Failed to reach significance
  - Common assaults
  - Unarmed robberies
  - Armed robberies
### Total violent crime

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<th>$b$</th>
<th>$SE\ b$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$sr^2$</th>
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<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
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*p<.05  **p<.01  ***p<.001
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$R^2$            | .26  |

$F$            | 2.46** |

*p<.05  **p<.01  ***p<.001
## Serious assaults

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\[ R^2 = 0.35 \]

\[ F = 3.88^{***} \]

*p<.05  **p<.01  ***p<.001
### Homicide-related

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* $p<.05$   ** $p<.01$   *** $p<.001$
† Reference category is ‘coastal zone’
# Sexual offences

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$R^2 = .24$

$F = 2.23^{**}$

*p<.05  **p<.01  ***p<.001
† Reference category is ‘coastal zone’
Predicting change in violence

• Contributors
  - Ethnic heterogeneity
  - Residential instability
  - Population density
  - Indicators of economic status
  - Settlement zones

• No evidence for contribution
  - Familial instability
  - Primary industry workforce quotients
  - Age profile
  - Gender balance
  - Accessibility/remoteness index of Australia Plus (ARIA+)
Research questions

- Is social and economic disruption related to fluctuation in violent crime in non-metropolitan Queensland?

- Are some types of violence more susceptible to social and economic disruption than others?

- **How can an exploration of ‘extremes’ contribute to understanding this process?**
• 10 SLAs registered as ‘extremes’

• 18 cases of extreme change
  ➢ 14 cases were extreme increases (78 per cent)
  ➢ 4 cases were extreme decreases (22 per cent)

• All settlement zones except the remote interior

• Evenly distributed between ‘accessible’ and ‘very remote’ categories of remoteness
Conclusions and implications

• Overall decline in violence across Queensland

• More extreme increases than there are extreme reductions in violence

• Crime specificity is important

• Change matters

• Further exploration is needed into understanding the extremes
Future thoughts

- How can this type of study be replicated on a national scale to better gauge the national experience of violence and social change?

- How can this type of study be replicated on a local scale to understand micro-social process (e.g. Mt Isa’s lead scandal)

- How can these findings feed into understanding of community resilience?

- Theory generalisability question for the focal shift from urban to rural

- What can we learn from social organisation and some types of violence (sexual offences, domestic violence, stock-related offences)?