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Fear of Victimization Among Incarcerated Youths: Examining the Effects of Institutional “Neighborhood” Characteristics and Gang Membership

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Abstract

This study examines whether neighborhood factors found to predict fear of crime among the general population can be adapted to explain inmate fear of victimization inside juvenile correctional institutions. We test (a) whether institutional physical disorder, resident trust, and formal social control can predict fear of victimization, and (b) whether the importance of these factors for fear of victimization varies based on preincarceration street gang status. Using data from a large national sample of incarcerated youths, findings indicate non-gang members are more afraid of institutional victimization than gang members, confirming findings about levels of fear between these groups on the street. “Neighborhood” (institutional) physical disorder and resident trust predicted fear for gang and non-gang youths, whereas formal social control was significant only among non-gang youths. We discuss policy implications and directions for future research.

Keywords

fear of crime, gangs, juveniles, incarceration

Crime often involves offenders hurting each other rather than hurting nonoffenders (Jennings et al., 2010; Schrek, Stewart, & Osgood, 2008). The victim–offender overlap is especially true in the correctional environment, where inmate-on-inmate assaults and other victimizations are commonplace due to the spatial concentration of offenders and increased stressors associated with incarceration (Irwin, 2005; McCorkle, 1992; Steiner, Ellison, Butler, & Cain, 2017; Sykes, 1958; Toch, 1992; Wooldredge, 1998).

Gang members not only commit more crime than nonmembers, but they are also significantly more likely to be victimized due to their involvement in crime, risky behaviors, ongoing rivalries, and “turf wars” (DeLisi, Barnes, Beaver, & Gibson, 2009; Fleisher & Decker, 2001; Fox, 2013; Peterson, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2004; Taylor, Freng, Esbensen, & Peterson, 2008). Gang inmates in jail (Fox, Lane, & Akers, 2010, 2013) and in prison (Fox, Rufino, & Kercher, 2012; Rufino, Fox, Cramer, & Kercher, 2013; Rufino, Fox, & Kercher, 2012) report significantly more victimization outside of jail/prison than non-gang members. Yet, one study showed it was juveniles’ involvement in gang crime, not gang membership alone, that was related to increases in violent victimization (see Katz, Webb, Fox, & Shaffer, 2011). These behaviors often continue into institutional settings.

Despite the gang–victimization relationship, compelling evidence indicates that gang members are significantly less afraid of crime on the street than non-gang members (Lane & Fox, 2012; Melde, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2009). Whether this is true inside juvenile correctional institutions remains unknown. Fear of crime researchers have generally overlooked the institutional environment, despite evidence that victimization risk on the inside is high. Mendel (2011) summarizes instances of maltreatment reported in the media and documented in lawsuits against juvenile confinement facilities, leading him to conclude that they are dangerous places. Government reports also indicate that unconstitutional conditions and maltreatment are common. About 12% of confined youths in juvenile institutions report experiencing sexual victimization there (Beck, Harrison, & Guerino, 2010). Evidence suggests that fear of victimization is part of life in these institutions. For example, the most recent Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (SYRP) shows 38% of youths fear being

attacked by residents and/or correctional staff (Sedlak & McPherson, 2010). Incarcerated youths in California regularly fear for their safety from staff and other inmates due to gang violence and racial tensions (Murray, Baird, Mills, Loughran, & Platt, 2006).

Understanding fear of victimization in youth facilities is especially critical because state juvenile justice systems generally have a rehabilitation mission that aims to protect the “best interests of the child” (Greenwood & Turner, 2011). Incarcerated youths are better able to grow, mature, and improve their skills by focusing on programming rather than on protecting their personal safety (MacKenzie, Wilson, Armstrong, & Gover, 2001; Maitland & Sluder, 1996; Styve, MacKenzie, Gover, & Mitchell, 2000). As Maslow (1943) argued about those consumed with fear, “if it is extreme enough and chronic enough, [they may be] living almost for safety alone” (p. 43). We cannot expect youths who feel unsafe in our correctional facilities to do anything more than try to survive, even though society incarcerates them in hopes of changing their antisocial thought processes and behaviors. Fear itself is stressful, and chronic stress in childhood can have consequences for youths’ brain, health, learning, and behavior well beyond their time in the facility (Shonkoff et al., 2012).

This study addresses gaps in prior literature by identifying factors that increase fear among incarcerated youths and by extending social constructs developed in the communities and neighborhoods literature by applying those concepts to the correctional “neighborhood.” Specifically, we examine the impact of perceived trust of peers, institutional physical disorder, and formal social control on fear of victimization inside facilities. Given gang members’ heightened victimization risk, we compare these impacts on both gang and non-gang members.

Effects of Trust, Disorder, and Formal Social Control on Fear of Victimization in the Institutional “Neighborhood”

Tough Neighborhoods

Traditional neighborhoods have a powerful effect on both crime and fear of crime (see Bursik & Grasmick, 1993). Socially disorganized areas characterized by

residents' incapacity to work collectively to solve community problems and those with concentrated disadvantage (e.g., extreme poverty) are much more likely to experience disorder and crime (Bursik, 1988; Sampson, 2011). They experience lower collective efficacy, defined as "cohesion and mutual trust among residents with shared expectations for intervening in support of neighborhood social control" (Sampson, 2012, p. 127; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Low-income African Americans and Hispanics are much more likely than poor Whites to experience the effects of concentrated disadvantage, including offending and victimization (Jargowsky, 2015). Youths in juvenile institutions also are disproportionately minority, and many come from these low-income, socially disorganized areas that are more often policed (Abrams & Hyun, 2009; Abrams & Terry, 2014; Bishop & Lieber, 2012; Inderbitzin, 2005).

Many youths in institutions are living in high-risk institutional environments, characterized by similar conditions as these neighborhoods on the outside, including disorder, violence, and lack of mutual trust. Staff often criticize youth (Abrams & Hyun, 2009; Nurse, 2010), encourage or ignore threats or violence among juvenile residents (Peterson-Badali & Koegl, 2002), and promote views of other residents as dangerous to prevent trouble inside (Nurse, 2010). This results in youth feeling powerless, little connection to each other, and increased racial tension. Violence upon entry to the facility becomes the way for youth to gain power and respect inside (Abrams, Anderson-Nathe, & Aguilar, 2008), even when actual violence is relatively rare—the threat of violence is constant (Inderbitzin, 2005).

While fear of crime researchers have generally neglected fear inside correctional institutions, studies of juvenile facilities have included measures of fear. Consistent with fear research (see Lane, Rader, Henson, Fisher, & May, 2014), Kupchik and Snyder (2009) found that girls as well as residents in more violent facilities were more afraid than others. Cesaroni and Peterson-Badali (2005) also found that about one third of youths believed there was a medium or high risk of attack, and 20% worried about being attacked.

Neighborhoods and Fear

Conceptually, studying the impact of neighborhood characteristics on fear is driven by the perspective that seeing and experiencing negative surroundings leads to fear of victimization. Although not previously considered in this manner by fear of crime researchers, we contend that neighborhood characteristics are relevant to the institutional “neighborhood” as well. In their consideration of the how well official reports of misconduct correspond to prisoner perceptions of safety, Daggett and Camp (2009) argued that prisons can be considered a neighborhood and problematic conditions of confinement can be considered disorder. Their analysis did not use perceptions of facility disorder to predict fear of victimization, and their data did not focus on juvenile institutions. Although defined differently in correctional institutions, perceptions of peer trust, physical disorder, and formal social control inside should be important predictors of fear in the both adult and juvenile correctional facilities. In fact, these experiences may be intensified in institutions—where the perceived safety of “home” is out of reach—where risk and fear of victimization are always present (see Abbot, 1981; Crouch & Marquart, 1990; Daggett & Camp, 2009; Fleisher & Decker, 2001; Irwin, 1980; Sykes, 1958).

Fear of victimization is related to the level of trust one has in neighbors to be kind and supportive rather than do emotional or physical harm. A lack of trust that others will behave as expected (e.g., remain law abiding) fueled by people who look and act different leads to fear in the general population (see Merry, 1981). Skogan and Maxfield (1981) argued decades ago this distrust results from existing disorder, which in turn increases fear because it signals that crime (or harm caused by other residents) may be there. This is especially true in areas perceived to be disordered where “residents are continually confronted with obstreperous and unpredictable people, many of whom may seem hostile and potentially dangerous” (Skogan, 1990, p. 76). Indeed, areas with more minorities are perceived as more disordered, regardless of one’s own race, due in part to stigma, implicit bias, and racialized meanings associated with disorder (Sampson, 2012).

More disordered areas have less collective efficacy (Sampson, 2012). In the correctional institution, one might consider how likely it is that one can trust and rely on “neighbors,” cellmates, or others incarcerated in the institution to intervene if

needed, or how likely others will work to make the environment a better place to live. In institutions, as in some neighborhoods, assessing trust among incarcerated peers might be complicated in that one might be able to trust some to intervene but others to cause problems, and racial differences may heighten distrust.

In the fear of crime literature, neighborhood disorder typically refers to perceived social factors (e.g., youths hanging out, drug dealers, and gang members) and physical conditions (e.g., rundown houses, unkempt yards, and graffiti) that lead one to believe that crime is a problem (Skogan, 1990). Within the general population, findings consistently show neighborhood disorder predicts crime-related fear. Disorder also predicts fear of crime among offenders (e.g., May, 2001; May, Vartanian, & Virgo, 2002), although Lane and Fox (2012) found that it only mattered for non-gang offenders.

Extending the concept of neighborhood disorder, physical disorder may enhance inmates' fear of crime within the correctional setting. Physical disorder in the correctional institution might include problems such as damaged walls, dirt, negative smells, rodents, and a generally messy environment (see Daggett & Camp, 2009; Sedlak & McPherson, 2010). As in the external community, these "neighborhood" problems may signal to people living in correctional institutions that others do not care about the "neighborhood" and that victimization risk is high. Given the lack of control that inmates have over their institutional environments and their inability to "escape" to safer confines (e.g., home), the effects of these factors on fear inside might be even stronger than in the external community.

Another relevant "neighborhood" factor is the level of formal social control exerted by the criminal justice system. In external neighborhoods, formal social control can be positive or negative. Police presence can be seen as protective, unnecessarily prohibitive if police are aggressive or harass residents, or as both necessary and oppressive at the same time (e.g., Fagan & Davies, 2000). For young African American men in particular, a large majority have suffered what they perceived as police harassment and some have experienced physically abusive police behaviors, but many also wish the police were better at protecting them and others from crime.

These experiences lead to negative views of the system, and over time, increased cynicism (Brunson, 2007; Fagan & Tyler, 2005; Gau & Brunson, 2010). Despite these problems, in the free world, people generally rely upon formal authorities, including police, to protect them from others who seek to do harm. In juvenile correctional facilities, youths must rely on staff to fill this same role. Indeed, prisons are considered “total institutions” where one of the primary purposes is to control inmates’ lives (Goffman, 1961). Yet, while some community youths may not trust authority figures, this perception is especially prevalent among system-involved youths. Research shows that inmates do not necessarily trust officers to help (see Abrams & Hyun, 2009; Nurse, 2010). Moreover, staff may be the source of the problem if they harass or abuse inmates, or ignore or encourage threats or violence between inmates (see Nurse, 2010; Peterson-Badali & Koegl, 2002). In the current study, formal social control refers to how likely youths perceive that correctional staff will intervene to solve problems that arise. Such intervention could pertain to whether staff work to prevent violence and sexual coercion among residents, whether staff protect vulnerable residents, and whether staff care about the youths they control. We examine whether youths are more likely to be afraid of other residents if they believe that staff do not care about and protect them from harm. In other words, if youth believe the correctional officers cannot or will not protect them, are they more fearful of victimization?

Why Gang Membership Might Matter

Few studies examining fear of crime compare fear among gang and non-gang members (Lane, 2006, 2009; Lane & Fox, 2012, 2013; May, 2001; May et al., 2002). In studies examining youth offender groups, youths were more likely to be afraid of serious violent crimes, such as shooting and murder (Lane, 2006, 2009). None of these studies specifically examined fear inside correctional institutions. Lane and Fox (2012) found offenders generally did not admit fear, and gang members especially were less fearful of victimization including gang crime. Lane and Fox also found that community social and physical disorder and racial heterogeneity predicted fear for non-gang members, but not for current or ex-gang members, arguing that gang members might be “emotionally bolstered by their gang membership, even though

they are cognitively aware of the increased risk of being hurt” (Lane & Fox, 2012, p. 516). Similarly, in their study of middle school youths, Melde et al. (2009) found those who reported being in gangs reported more victimization, but noted that over time they became less fearful compared with non-gang members. They argued that although people often join gangs for protection, part of the gang culture involves showing no fear even in the face of more victimization and risk and violence becomes accepted as part of life in the gang (Melde et al., 2009). Research has yet to determine whether gang members really do become less afraid or are simply masking their feelings to fit into the group.

To date, few studies have tested theoretical reasons why gang members are less afraid despite the fact that they are more heavily involved in crime and victimization. The current study is among the first to examine contextual factors for this relationship by extending concepts related to neighborhood characteristics to explain fear inside correctional institutions. In the only other study of incarcerated gang and non-gang members’ fear of crime, Lane and Fox (2012) found that perceptions of physical and social disorder significantly increased fear of property and personal crime on the street for non- gang offenders but not ex-gang or current gang members. Furthermore, perceptions of physical disorder increased fear of gang crime among non- gang members only. Resident trust (in terms of collective efficacy) was not a significant predictor of fear among either group (Lane & Fox, 2012). The current study builds upon the work of Lane and Fox (2012) by sampling juvenile offenders, incorporating measures of formal social control and resident trust, and examining disorder within juvenile correctional facilities (not home neighborhoods).

The Current Study

This study seeks to understand how peer trust, physical disorder, and formal social control within juvenile correctional institutions contribute to youths’ fear of victimization while incarcerated. We examine the variation of these institutional “neighborhood” effects on fear based on self-reported gang membership prior to incarceration. We employ regression analysis to determine whether institutional “neighborhood” conditions influence differences in fear, controlling for relevant youth

characteristics including gang membership.

Few studies examine fear among incarcerated populations (e.g., Hemmens & Marquart, 1999; Kupchik & Snyder, 2009; Lane, 2009; Lane & Fox, 2012, 2013; May, 2001; May et al., 2002; McCorkle, 1992, 1993a, 1993b), and even fewer compare fear of crime among gang and non-gang members (Lane & Fox, 2012). This study is unique in its application of disorder, peer trust, and formal social control to the correctional institution environment and examination of their impact on fear of victimization during incarceration. Unlike prior studies of fear among offenders, we utilize a large national sample to address the following questions: (a) Do institutional neighborhood characteristics (disorder, peer trust, and formal social control) affect offender's fear of victimization while incarcerated, and (b) Does the impact of these factors on fear of victimization depend upon the presence or absence of gang membership? We expect that youth who perceive more disorder, have less trust, and perceive less formal social control will express more fear of victimization. We expect that these contextual characteristics will matter more for non-gang members.

Data and Analytical Approach

We examined these questions using data from the National Evaluation of Juvenile Correction Facilities (NEJCF) Resident Survey, a cross-sectional study of adjudicated, incarcerated youth perceptions (MacKenzie, Gover, Styve & Mitchell, 1999, MacKenzie, Gover, Armstrong & Mitchell, 2001). These data include 3,714 youth surveys voluntarily completed at 49 correctional facilities in 17 states¹ without compensation. To explore the links between fear of victimization, institutional neighborhood characteristics, and gang membership, we first report descriptive statistics for the full sample and make statistical comparisons for group differences among gang and non-gang members. Next, we estimate a series of multivariate regression models (ordinary least squares regression models) using listwise deletion. Due to the clustered nature of our data (i.e., individuals are nested within correctional facilities), models employed robust standard errors for clustered data to account for potential bias.

Measures

Dependent Variable

Fear of victimization was measured using a summative index of two self-reported items. The items read “I am afraid of other residents at this institution” and “I am concerned with being hit or punched by other residents.” Response options were *never* (1), *rarely* (2), *sometimes* (3), *often* (4), and *always* (5). Higher combined scores on the index indicate greater fear of victimization. The items were moderately, yet significantly correlated ($r = .4973, p < .05$). Assessment of Cronbach’s alpha indicated acceptable reliability for the fear of victimization items ($\alpha = .648$).

Perceptions of the Institution

We used a series of standardized scales to measure the institutional “neighborhood” context including youth perceptions of institutional physical disorder, peer trust, and formal social control (see Table 1 for items). All items were based on a 5-point Likert-type scale as described above. The Institutional Physical Disorder ($\alpha = .75$, six items) scale asked youths about the physical condition of the correctional facility where they were incarcerated (Styve et al., 2000). Positive scale values indicate higher levels of physical disorder. Peer Trust ($\alpha = .64$, three items) assessed the extent to which youths perceived residents got along with each other. Questions measured the extent to which youth perceived others said mean things, were unfriendly, and gave others a hard time. We reverse coded responses so that higher values indicated higher levels of peer trust. While these measures do not directly ask about trust or whether they expect their peers are willing to help, we expect they do tap the same construct as items used to measure trust elsewhere, such as “people in this neighborhood generally don’t get along with each other” (Sampson et al., 1997, p. 920). The Formal Social Control scale ($\alpha = .77$, six items) assessed the extent to which youths perceived staff were willing to act for the benefit of youths. Higher values on this scale indicated greater formal social control.²

Individual Characteristics

Consistent with prior literature (Curry, 2000; Decker, Katz, & Webb, 2008; Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001; Webb, Katz, & Decker, 2006), *gang membership* was measured by the youths' response to "Before coming to this facility, were you involved with a gang?" with answer options of yes (1) or no (0). This approach has the advantage of capturing street gang members exclusively, while avoiding the distinct concept of "prison gang" membership, which can be temporary. About one third (35.73%) reported gang involvement. This is a higher percentage of gang members than studies of nonincarcerated youth show (around 10%) (e.g., Esbensen & Winfree, 1998; Klein & Maxson, 2006; Pyrooz & Decker, 2013), but lower than other studies of incarcerated youths (51.15%; Katz et al., 2011).

Table 1. Description of Theoretical Variables (Institutional Characteristics).

Institutional physical disorder ($\alpha = .75$)	Factor score
People could get hurt because the place is so dirty.	.694
There are bad odors or poor air circulation.	.688
Insects, rodents, and dirt are a problem here.	.700
Many residents look messy here.	.714
My living area looks messy here.	.735
One thing bad about this place is that it's so noisy.	.760
Peer support ($\alpha = .64$)	Factor score
Residents say mean things to other residents at this institution	.618
Residents give other residents with personal problems a hard time.	.499
Other residents are unfriendly.	.520
Formal social control ($\alpha = .77$)	Factor score
If a resident believes he will be hurt by another resident, the staff will protect him.	.724
Staff have caught and punished the real trouble makers among residents.	.746
There are enough staff to keep residents safe here.	.706
Staff prevent violence among residents.	.730
Staff care about residents here.	.739
Staff here let me know what is expected of me.	.750

Demographic variables included as control variables were gender (male = 1, female = 0), race/ethnicity (e.g., White, non-Hispanic was the contrast group), age (continuous), and length of stay (months that the youth had been incarcerated). We also controlled for youths' belief that "It is safer for residents who ARE members of a gang" (measured on the same 5-point Likert-type scale as other items, where 1 = *never* and 5 = *always*).

Results

Individual characteristics of the 3,714 youths comprising the sample are outlined in Table 2. Most respondents were male with no single ethnic majority represented. The average age was 16. Youths were committed for a wide range of offenses including property, person, and drug-related offenses. Many had multiple prior commitments, so these were not minor offenders. At the time of survey, youths had been in the current facility for an average of about 4 months. Rates of youth gang membership prior to incarceration varied greatly at each facility, from 8% to 75% of youths. When comparing gang members and non-gang members, results indicated that gang members were statistically younger, more often male, with longer lengths of stay for their current conviction, and had a greater number of prior commitments to a juvenile institution. Hispanic youths and those who identified themselves as other races (most commonly American Indian or Asian) were more likely to indicate gang involvement prior to incarceration versus those who identified with other racial or ethnic classifications.

This study is primarily interested in fear of victimization among institutionalized youths. Table 3 features the distribution of responses for both fear items. About half of the youths were not afraid (e.g., they reported "never" for both items; $n = 2,022$; 54%), but nearly 1,700 youths felt some degree of fear ($n = 1,698$; 46%).

Do Contextual Characteristics Matter?

Our first research question asked whether youths who perceived more disorder, less trust, and less formal social control would be more afraid of victimization. As displayed in Table 4, results indicated institutional physical disorder,

Table 2. Sample Descriptives.

Individual characteristics	All youth	Gang members	Non-gang members	Test of group differences
	(N = 3,714)	(n = 1,327)	(n = 2,387)	χ^2 (p)
Gang member (yes = 1)	36%			
Male*	94%	95%	93%	5.1 (.02)
African American*	34%	26%	39%	59.4 (.00)
White, non-Hispanic*	33%	23%	38%	83.4 (.00)
Hispanic*	19%	32%	12%	218.5 (.00)
Other*	13%	18%	11%	38.7 (.00)
Property offense	28%	29%	29%	.00 (.96)
Person offense*	23%	26%	22%	6.7 (.01)
Drug offense*	13%	10%	16%	23.5 (.00)
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	t (p)
Age*	16.2 (1.2)	16.1 (1.2)	16.2 (1.2)	2.34 (.02)
Length of stay (months)*	4.04 (5.9)	4.72 (7.5)	3.64 (4.7)	-5.28 (.00)
Safer for gang members*	2.25 (1.5)	2.64 (1.5)	2.03 (1.4)	-12.3 (.00)
Perceived fear of victimization*	3.46 (2.1)	3.36 (2.0)	3.52 (2.2)	2.32 (.02)
Institutional characteristics	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	
Institutional physical disorder	0.00 (1.0) 14.6 (5.6)	0.11 (0.99) 15.2 (5.5)	-0.06 (0.99) 14.3 (5.6)	-4.84 (.00) Range 6-30
Unstandardized physical disorder				
Peer trust	0.00 (1.0)	-0.11 (0.95)	0.06 (1.0)	4.87 (.00)
Unstandardized peer trust	9.3 (3.0)	9.6 (3.1)	9.1 (3.1)	Range 6-30
Formal social control	0.00 (1.0)	-0.10 (0.98)	0.06 (1.0)	4.31 (.00)
Unstandardized formal social control	20.7 (5.8)	20.2 (5.8)	21.1 (5.8)	Range 3-15

Note. * indicate statistically significant differences between gang and non-gang youth ($p < .01$).

peer trust, and formal social control were all significantly related to fear of victimization. More specifically, youths who thought their institutions were dirty, messy, and noisy were more afraid. When youths were mean to other youths, gave other youths a hard

time, and generally unfriendly, youths were more afraid. When youths believed they could depend upon staff to prevent violence among youths and keep residents safe, they were less afraid. Consequently, our expectations based on the literature were supported.

Table 3. Number (and Row Percent) of Juvenile Residents Who Admitted Being Fearful of Other Residents.

I am concerned with being hit or punched by other residents	I am afraid of other residents at this institution					Total
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Never	2,022 (93%)	79 (4%)	31 (1%)	8 (1%)	25 (1%)	2,165 (100%)
Rarely	328 (62%)	157 (30%)	24 (5%)	13 (2%)	5 (1%)	527 (100%)
Sometimes	213 (48%)	96 (22%)	97 (22%)	23 (5%)	15 (3%)	444 (100%)
Often	70 (44%)	13 (8%)	38 (24%)	32 (20%)	6 (4%)	159 (100%)
Always	207 (49%)	28 (7%)	41 (10%)	27 (6%)	122 (29%)	425 (100%)
Total	2,840 (76%)	373 (10%)	231 (6%)	103 (3%)	173 (5%)	3,720 (100%)

Note. Percentages rounded to nearest whole number.

Table 4. OLS Regression Predicting Fear of Victimization While Incarcerated (With Robust SE).

	All youth (n = 3,211)	Gang members (n = 1,131)	Non-gang members (n = 2,080)
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Intercept	3.23 (.32)**	2.80 (.29)**	3.58 (.45)**
Gang membership	-0.44 (.08)**	—	—
Male	0.073 (.19)	-0.03 (.20)	0.13 (.19)
Hispanic	0.04 (.13)	0.06 (.13)	0.16 (.20)
African American	-0.16 (.15)	-0.04 (.25)	-0.21 (.12)
Other race	-.08 (.12)	0.14 (.17)	-0.29 (.16)
Age	-0.01 (.01)	0.01 (.01)	-0.04 (.02)*
Length of stay (months)	0.01 (.00)*	0.01 (.01)	0.01 (.00)
Safer for gang members	0.19 (.04)**	0.08 (.04)	0.26 (.05)**
Institutional physical disorder	0.31 (.06)**	0.35 (.09)**	0.29 (.06)**
Peer trust	-0.36 (.04)**	-0.18 (.06)*	-0.46 (.06)**
Formal social control	-0.13 (.06)*	-0.07 (.06)	-0.16 (.08)*
Adjusted R ²	.14	.09	.19

Note. Gang membership, male, and ethnic categories are coded as 1 = yes; 0 = no. Racial contrast group is White. OLS = ordinary least squares.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

Gang members were significantly *less* fearful of victimization compared with

non-gang members. Youths who had been incarcerated longer were significantly more afraid than youths with shorter lengths of stay. Youths who believed it was safer for gang members were more afraid. Interestingly, gender was not a statistically significant predictor of fear, which may have been a reflection of the overwhelmingly male sample (94%).

Gang Members Versus Non-Gang Members

Our second research question asked whether the institutional neighborhood factors (institutional physical disorder, resident trust, and formal social control) predicting fear had differential effects for gang and non-gang members. We estimated the same theoretical model for gang and non-gang member subsamples. Results indicated that in both subsamples, institutional physical disorder and low trust among incarcerated peers were significantly related to a more fear of victimization. A test of coefficients between the groups indicated that although both subsamples were directionally consistent, the magnitude of the effect of peer trust on fear was significantly greater for non-gang members. If respondents felt the institution was dirty, messy, and noisy, their fear was higher. Similarly, youths were more fearful when they perceived others in the institution as mean, hurtful, and unfriendly (e.g., low resident trust), but this was especially true for non-gang members. Interestingly, formal social control was only significantly related to fear among non-gang members. When non-gang members felt they could count on staff to protect them, they were less fearful.

Discussion

We began by arguing that neighborhood factors regularly found to predict fear of crime among the general population could be adapted to help explain fear of victimization inside correctional institutions. Specifically, we were interested in understanding (a) whether institutional “neighborhood” disorder, peer trust, and formal social control predicted fear of victimization inside youth correctional facilities, and (b) whether the importance of these neighborhood factors varied based on gang involvement. Analysis of a large national sample of incarcerated youths revealed two

broad findings that merit further discussion.

First, for the whole sample, we found that contextual or “neighborhood” characteristics—more institutional disorder, less trust of peers, and less formal social control—increased fear. When we compared gang and non-gang members, we found institutional variables that mattered for both groups were physical disorder and resident trust. Unkempt institutions and mean or hurtful people there increased fear whether one was in a gang or not. Low levels of formal social control increased the fears of non-gang members only. Those youths who were not involved in a gang and therefore not buffered by group membership and who felt they could not trust staff to help felt especially vulnerable and afraid. The latter measure gets at the core problem that might be symbolized by concern about physical disorder. That is, “neighborhood” disorder is theoretically related to fear precisely because it symbolizes a lack of care and concern among neighbors, which we partly capture by our specific measures of resident trust (see Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Skogan, 1990). Lack of trust in formal social control agents also matters.

Second, our expectation that non-gang members would be more afraid than gang members was confirmed. For the full sample, gang membership was significantly and negatively associated with fear. As indicated, the importance of some institutional factors did vary based on gang membership, so too did the effects of other individual characteristics. Non-gang members who believed gang members were safer were more afraid. Consistent with prior studies (e.g., Lane, 2006, 2009; Lane & Fox, 2012), youths with less experience in the criminal lifestyle (less gang experience) were more afraid. Supplemental analyses reveal that youth who were incarcerated for longer periods of time were also significantly more afraid (Pearson $\chi^2 = 945.721$; $p < .000$). The finding that gang members were less afraid clearly does not imply that gang membership is a socially desirable method for reducing one’s fear. Alternatively, this finding underscores the problematic mismatch regarding gang members’ lower fear and higher risk of victimization, which deserves further study.

Some methodological limitations of the current study limit the generalizability of these findings. Our key variable of interest asked youths to rate how afraid they were of

other residents in the institution and how concerned they were about being hit or punched, which is a more general measure than those that tap fear of more specific types of crime. In addition, data were not collected to measure perceived risk of specific crimes (see Ferraro, 1995; Warr, 2000) or variation of fear levels during the day versus night (Cook & Fox, 2011; Fisher & Sloan, 2003; Lane, Gover, & Dahod, 2009). Future research that addresses these limitations could inform staffing levels and other routine activities within institutions to reduce fear, at least for non-gang members who rely upon correctional officers to protect them.

Second, the data lack some specificity regarding the gang membership measure. The youths were asked whether they were involved with a gang before their incarceration, which could have been interpreted as either current or past street gang membership, thereby isolating effects of current gang status. It is possible that these groups are more similar than different in terms of fear. Lane and Fox (2012) found no differences among the groups for fear of personal crime and gang crime, but ex-gang members were more afraid than current members of property crime. To be sure, future research is needed that can distinguish between current and former gang members' fear of crime separately.

In addition, the current study was unable to collect data on the actual levels of victimization within the institution, a potentially important indicator. Some research finds that people who are victimized are significantly more likely to be afraid of crime (Skogan, 1987; Wilcox Rountree & Land, 1996), whereas other research does not support this link (Fisher & Nasar, 1992; Wilcox, Jordan, & Pritchard, 2007). Even less is understood about the fear– victimization relationship among incarcerated offenders. Recent evidence indicates that prior property and personal victimization do not impact fear of property or personal crime on the street among jail inmates (but personal victimization was related to fear of gang crime; Lane & Fox, 2012). Future research should attempt to sort out the relevance of prior victimization on fear inside.

Policy Implications

By understanding and addressing the reasons incarcerated youth feel

vulnerable, facilities may become safer, more efficient and effective. Fear of victimization might prompt inmates to try to protect themselves by obtaining dangerous contraband, fashioning homemade weapons, launching preemptory attacks on others, and so on, thereby causing more institutional problems (see MacKenzie, 1987; McCorkle, 1992). Reduced fear may lead to fewer rule infractions and disciplinary reports, thereby easing day-to-day management of facilities and possibly decreasing the average inmate's length of stay (e.g., increasing good time), all of which are important for a fiscally conservative approach and a safer working environment for staff. In addition, given the research showing that stressors in childhood, such as fear, can have long-term consequences on learning, behavior, and health outcomes, reducing fear in incarcerated adolescents may provide immeasurable benefits way beyond those related to institutional management.

These findings indicate that when youths inside the institution say mean things to each other, are unfriendly, make fun of people with problems, and so on, youths are more afraid. A lack of confidence among a significant proportion of youths that correctional staff will protect them also results in fear. In addition, improving relationships among youths and between residents and staff may reduce fear of victimization in addition to being a sound component of institutional management.

It is possible that gang members are one source of fear for the other youths. In this sample, although it was not a significant difference, gang members were more likely to indicate that gang members were safer and, as a group, they express significantly less fear than those who were not gang members. Although this study did not directly measure the sources of fear by asking inmates what specifically made them afraid, these results may imply what may seem obvious to some—that managing gangs and resulting problems in facilities may be one way to reduce fear among the remainder of the inmates.

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Notes

1. Facilities varied in capacity, and therefore, the number of youths responding to the survey also varied, ranging from 13 to 202 youths with an average of 78 youths per facility. The overall response rate of youths solicited to participate was 94% with no individual facility response rate below 90%.
2. Dimensions measuring perceptions of the institution were related but not collinear. Physical disorder was negatively correlated with both formal social control ($r = -.525$) and resident trust ($r = -.414$). Formal social control was positively correlated with resident trust ($r = .268$).

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