Snitches Get Stitches: The (Under)Reporting of Crime, Gang Status, and Perceptions of Justice

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**Objective**

In the event of a crime, there is evidence to support that victims and bystanders will at times fail to report criminal incidents due to being intimidated or verbally threatened by a perpetrator. Research in this area requires further insight into the post-incident decision making process in the aggregate once situational characteristics are accounted for, such as perceptions of the perpetrator and neighborhood context. The author of this study examined the rate at which victims report crimes when they perceive the perpetrator to be a gang member.

**Research Questions**

1. Does a perpetrator’s perceived gang status have any effect on reporting a crime?
2. Is intimidation a deterrent for reporting?
3. What other factors (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, region) lead to differences in reporting?

**Data/Methods**

Using the National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS), data were examined for a series of years (2005-2019) to analyze how intimidation functions in urban settings. Using firthlogit, survey results were regressed on a large sample \( n = 23,919 \) of respondents to test the efficacy of gang victimization and intimidation on reporting outcomes.

**Results**

Annually, roughly 3 – 4% of NCVS respondents believe the perpetrator is affiliated with a gang.

**Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Non-GM</th>
<th>GM</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crime Reporting</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>11,045</td>
<td>356</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>11,758</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td>24,830</td>
<td>1,151</td>
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**Discussion and Conclusion**

The results highlight the need for caution when interpreting the level of influence gangs exert on communities as future measures are taken to enhance measures of justice. The (under)reporting of crimes is not so much a product of gangs or intimidation, but a fracture in the system which reporting is built upon. Urban residents, specifically those of lower classes, have different perceptions of justice than the broader society. More accountability towards systemic issues in reporting are required outside of individual behavior for a comprehensive understanding of crime severity.

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