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Sweet Mothers and Gangbangers: Managing Crime in a Black Middle-Class Neighborhood

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Abstract

Black middle-class neighborhoods have higher internal poverty rates and are closer to high-poverty and high-crime areas than white middle-class

neighborhoods, which presents particular challenges to neighborhood social organization. This study uses ethnographic data from a black middle-class neighborhood in Chicago to explore how residents manage this ecological context. I find that dense social networks fostered by residential stability facilitate the informal supervision of neighborhood youth and enhance the activities of formal organizations and institutions. Nevertheless, the incorporation of gang members and drug dealers into the networks of law-abiding kin and neighbors thwarts efforts to completely rid the neighborhood of its criminal element. The conflicting effects of dense networks challenge traditional social organization theory.

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