

Deviance and Crime

This module focuses on factors related to juvenile delinquency.

1. Begin by going to the KIDS COUNT web site (<http://www.kidscount.org>) and click on “Kids Count Data Book Online.” Examine how “percent of teens not attending school and not working (ages 16-19)” varies across states. Think of this variable as a measure of teen idleness since these teenagers are not working or going to school.
 - Click on map and choose “percent teens not attending school/working” as your indicator and click on next step
 - Choose the most recent year for which data is available and go on to next step
 - a. Eyeballing the map, which region or regions of the country have a higher rate of teen idleness?
 - b. Click on ranking and repeating the steps of choosing an indicator and year, determine which state has the highest rate of teen idleness and record the percentage for that state. Note that you should skip the step of choosing a region since we are interested in all 50 states.
 - Record which state(s) has the best (in this case lowest percentage) ranking and the percentage for that state.
 - Record which state(s) has the worst (in this case highest percentage) ranking and the percentage for that state.
 - Subtract the low from the high percentage to determine the range of variation for “percent of teens not attending school/working.”

State Ranking	Percent of teens not attending school/working
(Best)	
(Worst)	
Variation (High – Low Percent)	

2. Examine “percent teens not attending school/work” as a trend over time.

- First, click on line graphs
 - Choose the United States, Minnesota and one other state. Consider choosing one of the worst or best-ranked states as a comparison.
 - Choose “percent teens not attending school/working” as an indicator
 - Graph data from 1990-1999
- a. Describe the overall national trend. Was there an increase, decrease, or did it stay the same. Put another way, nationally are we experiencing more or less teen idleness?
 - b. Describe the trend for Minnesota and the other state chosen. Do these state trends differ from the national trend? Describe any similarities and differences.
3. Merton’s strain theory of deviance suggests that deviance occurs when legitimate or institutionalized means (getting a good education and job) of achieving cultural goals (becoming wealthy or achieving high status) are blocked. We might expect that teens not attending school or working might experience strain. Let’s examine the relationship between teen idleness (percent of teens not attending school and not working: ages 16-19) and two juvenile justice indicators, Juvenile violent crime arrest rate (arrests per 100,000 youths age 10-17, 1998) and Juvenile property crime arrest rate (arrests per 100,000 youths age 10-17, 1998).
- a. Write a hypothesis consistent with Merton’s strain theory
 - b. To test the relationship between teen idleness (percent teens not attending school/working) and juvenile violent crime rate (arrests per 100,000 youths age 10-17, 1998), open the excel file called “tool_us.xls”.
 - Make a scatter plot by using the pull down menu
 - Let x be Idle (“percent teens not attending school/working 1998”) and y be “juvenile violent crime arrest rate 1998”
 - Cut and paste the scatter plot into a Word file and record the correlation coefficient.

- c. Write an interpretation of the correlation coefficient for the scatter plot (x = percent teens not attending school/working 1998), y = juvenile violent crime arrest rate 1998). See below for an explanation of the correlation coefficient.
 - d. Are there any data points that seem to stand out --not part of the cluster of data points? These are called outliers. Click on an outlier to see which state is represented.
 - e. Was the hypothesis confirmed? Explain your answer
4. Repeat these steps substituting juvenile property crime arrest rate as the new y variable.
- a. Write a hypothesis consistent with Merton's strain theory
 - b. To test the relationship between teen idleness (percent teens not attending school/working) and juvenile property crime rate (arrests per 100,000 youths age 10-17, 1998), open the excel file called "tool_us.xls".
 - Make a scatter plot by using the pull down menu
 - Let x be Idle ("percent teens not attending school/working 1998") and y be "juvenile property crime arrest rate 1998"
 - Cut and paste the scatter plot into a Word file and record the correlation coefficient.

- c. Write an interpretation of the correlation coefficient for the scatter plot (x = percent teens not attending school/working 1998), y = juvenile property crime arrest rate 1998). See below for an explanation of the correlation coefficient.

- d. Are there any data points that seem to stand out --not part of the cluster of data points? These are called outliers. Click on an outlier to see which state is represented.

- e. Was the hypothesis confirmed? Explain your answer

Correlation Coefficient Explanation:

The correlation coefficient or Pearson's r is a measure of the degree of linear association existing between two variables. We want to pay close attention to both the direction and strength of the association. A positive correlation is indicated by the absence of a negative sign and means that variables are changing in the same direction. An increase or decrease in one variable corresponds to the same change in another variable. For example, we would expect that the more time a student studies for an exam (x) the higher the exam score (y). A negative relationship is indicated by a minus sign and means that as one variable increases there is a corresponding decrease in another variable. The strength of a relationship is indicated by the numeric value of the coefficient. Coefficients range from 1.0 to -1.0 . These values are examples of perfect correlations. In reality most values are found in between 1.0 and -1.0 . Correlations of .30 or less (either + or -) are considered weak, .31 - .70 (either + or -) are deemed moderate and .71 and above (either + or -) considered strong. These are not absolute rules but should be used as a guide in interpretation. Note that the higher the correlation coefficient (either positive or negative), the more closely clustered the data points are in the shape of a diagonal line.

- f. Should we assume that Merton's theory is invalid? Assuming Merton is correct, what might be a better measure of juvenile justice than arrest rates?
5. Not all behavior classified as deviant is criminal activity. Becoming a teen mother is still considered to be deviant. While the stigma has lessened since the 1950s, teen pregnancy is considered a social problem because many of these children and their mothers live in poverty. While the causes of teen pregnancy are complicated, becoming a parent through early childbearing may for some be a route to adult status when other routes are blocked.
- a. Using Merton's Strain theory, develop a hypothesis between teen idleness or Idle (x) and teen birthrate (births per 1,000 females aged 15-17).
- b. To test the relationship between teen idleness (percent teens not attending school/working) and Teen birthrate, use the file "tool_us.xls".
- Make a scatter plot by using the pull down menu
 - Let x be "percent teens not attending school/working 1998" and y be "births per 1000 females aged 15-17 1999." Since we are hypothesizing that idleness can result in a pregnancy and a birth nine months later, it makes sense to have y measured in a later year. While data analysis over time is much more complicated than this with many pitfalls to avoid, this analysis allows us to emphasize the logic of time order and theoretical concepts.
 - Cut and paste scatter plot into word file and record the correlation coefficient.
- c. Interpret your findings
- d. Are there any data points that seem to stand out --not part of the cluster of data points? These are called outliers. Click on an outlier to see which state is represented.
- e. Was the hypothesis confirmed? Explain your answer.