

DROP IN 90S STREET CRIME TOLD ONLY HALF THE STORY OF VIOLENCE AND HARM IN THE U.S.

While Homicides, Sexual Offenses, and Batteries Decreased, The Less Dramatic and Publicized Hungry and Homeless Populations Skyrocketed (other major trends, as well)

NORTH MANCHESTER, Ind. --August 20, 2002--Manchester College researchers discovered the country's hungry population nearly doubled and the homeless population increased by an alarming 45 percent from 1995 to 2000*.

For the third consecutive year, a research team led by Dr. James Brumbaugh-Smith, Dr. Neil Wollman, and Dr. Brad Yoder have released the National Index of Violence and Harm, which compares data from 19 different variables from 1996 to 2000-- the most recent years of available data--to 1995. (For complete details about the index, visit www.manchester.edu/academic/programs/departments/peace_studies/vi/index.htm.)

Researcher Neil Wollman said, "After examining trends in the hungry and homeless populations from 1990 onward, we speculate that at least some of the increase is due to welfare law changes in 1996. How much can't be determined by our analysis."

The index is divided into two categories: personal and societal. The personal scale includes measures traditionally associated with violent acts, such as batteries, sexual assaults and homicides, while the societal scale includes measures such as hunger, air pollution, and infant mortality. The latter don't involve physical attacks, but result in individuals being hurt physically or sometimes psychologically. "Societal harm and violence is not as visible or dramatic as personal violence, but it can be just as devastating and typically affects more people," Wollman said.

Notwithstanding any personal responsibility for hunger and homelessness, the researchers consider these populations to be two indicators of "social negligence," or the way our nation has neglected and harmed its citizens. Social negligence, which also includes measures of inadequate health care and education, grew as a whole by nearly 30 percent during the time studied.

While government-related indicators (such as capital punishment, deaths by police intervention, and civil rights complaints against the government) had generally been increasing from 1995 to 1999, this trend abated, at least temporarily, in 2000.

However, the news is not all bad. In addition to the well publicized drop in street crime (homicides and robberies down more than 30 percent each**), the researchers found other encouraging results, with significant improvement in several societal areas: infant mortality; child abuse; hate crimes; and poverty disparity between whites and racial minorities, as well as between age groups. (Though, consistent with growing CEO-worker wage disparities, the wage difference increased between high and very low

income individuals.) And corporate-related indicators also had a significant downward trend, mainly due to drops in occupational injuries/illnesses and in occupational fatalities.

Interestingly, this good news-bad news result showed up even in ways that people harm themselves. Deaths attributable to smoking increased, while suicides/self injury and fatalities from alcohol went down.

Overall, the researchers' analysis reveals that personal harm and violence have decreased significantly since 1995, while the societal index has remained relatively stable. "It's remained stable because some measures have increased and others have decreased," Wollman said. "It's good, of course, that personal violence has gone down. But our society and societal institutions still tolerate harm to some segments of our population."

Manchester College--an independent, liberal arts college located in North Manchester, Ind., and a college of the Church of the Brethren--offers more than 45 areas of study to more than 1,160 students from 23 states and 29 countries.

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Notes to editors:

Dr. Brumbaugh-Smith is an associate professor of mathematics, Dr. Wollman is the senior fellow of the college's Peace Studies Institute and a psychology professor, and Dr. Yoder is a social work professor. The research team also includes former Manchester students Dustin Brown, Heidi Gross, and Ben Long.

* Statements in this release noting increases or decreases in index variables or other categories signify statistically significant trends upwards or downwards, respectively, from 1995-2000.

** FBI figures recently released for 2001 show an increase in homicides for the first time in many years. This, of course, will be reflected in next year's index.