

Pockets of Peace: A mixed methods, exploratory study of neighborhoods resilient to juvenile violence

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Abstract

Social science research has focused on hot spots of adolescent violence in marginalized urban neighborhoods for nearly a century. In contrast, in this study, we explore under-resourced urban areas that do not experience high rates of adolescent violence: “pockets of peace.” We use a mixed-method approach to identify the sociodemographic, geographic, and criminological commonalities and differences between pockets of peace and other areas of concentrated disadvantage dealing with high rates of adolescent violence in Indianapolis, IN. More than one out of every ten of Indianapolis' areas of concentrated disadvantage meet the criteria to be labeled “pockets of peace.” Quantitative data indicate that these areas have fewer prosocial institutions and experience lower homeownership rates than comparison under-resourced areas, and qualitative data point toward rental stability and residential longevity as potentially salient social factors within these contexts. As an alternative to using statistics to control for the context of structural disadvantage, studying pockets of peace and other “cold-spots” of adolescent violence presents an opportunity to understand community-level resilience within the real, lived context of structural disadvantage.

KEYWORDS

adolescent violence, community resilience, community violence, concentrated disadvantage, mixed-methods, neighborhood effects, urban neighborhoods

1 | INTRODUCTION

Violence is a priority health risk behavior for all adolescents living in the United States (Kann et al., 2018). However, it takes on even more importance for teens living in disadvantaged urban areas. Evidence dating back to the mid-20th century indicates that low-income, high minority neighborhoods shoulder a disproportionate burden of adolescent violence (Shaw & McKay, 1942). More than eight decades later, youth arrests for violence continue to be concentrated in these same types of neighborhoods (Friedson & Sharkey, 2015; Nation et al., 2021).

Empirically, we know a lot about neighborhoods that increase individual adolescents' propensity toward violence (Sampson et al., 2002). Yet, even those adolescents with a tendency toward violence are not violent in all settings at all times. We rarely consider or discuss the unique aspects of disadvantaged neighborhood environments where youth as a population group—regardless of their socioeconomic disadvantages or even individual resiliencies—are unlikely to enact violent behavior.

Comparisons between under-resourced urban neighborhoods and other, more advantaged areas, provide most of our empirical knowledge about urban neighborhoods and adolescent violence. This approach has been helpful in terms of uncovering social processes like social control, social cohesiveness, and collective efficacy (Sampson et al., 1997) that help to explain why, on average, disadvantaged areas experience higher rates of adolescent violence. However, disadvantaged areas are heterogeneous. In this paper, we take advantage of that heterogeneity and confine comparisons within areas of concentrated disadvantage. The goal is to add to previous statistical models that tell us about communities *after controlling for* disadvantage and instead focus on exploring violence rates *given the existence* of disadvantage. In sum, this paper uses mixed methods to identify some socio-demographic, geographic, and criminological commonalities and differences between areas of concentrated disadvantage experiencing low rates of adolescent violence (pockets of peace) versus those with high rates of adolescent violence.

The goal of using this approach is to learn about communities that are specifically resilient to adolescent violence. Although it may not be precise to call them “peaceful” given that they experience a great deal of structural violence (Anta & Men, 2018; Lane et al., 2008) the fact is that these areas—according to official statistics—are experiencing lower levels of adolescent violence than would be expected given all the other social conditions and structural limitations. The neighborhoods themselves—not individual adolescents—are the focus of the research.

2 | BACKGROUND

Although there are questions about how well it predicts behavior, the concept of implicit bias (Brownstein et al., 2020), and the nearly automatic negative response people of all races and ages have when presented with images of Black people (Levinson et al., 2014) is established. Even trained police officers are likely to perceive people of color as a threat even when they are not engaging in objectively threatening behavior (Price & Payton, 2017; Spencer et al., 2016).

Sampson and Stephen (2004) have rigorously detailed how people come to perceive certain urban neighborhoods as disorderly and undesirable places—places that even police associate with high rates of violence regardless of the actual statistics. Their analyses indicate that the racial and economic characteristics of the people living in the area are significant predictors of whether these neighborhoods are perceived as dangerous. In their study, “urban blight’s” significance is amplified by the presence of minorities and watered down by the presence of White people. People see broken windows, boarded-up buildings, public drinking, and graffiti, but primarily perceive these things as problematic (i.e., “see disorder”) and dangerous, only if poor Black or Brown individuals live in the area.

Nonetheless, labeling, and concentrating on specific areas as high crime areas (and often, specifically “violent” areas) has been touted as one of the optimal policing methods available in cities. Aptly named, “hot-spot policing”

acknowledges that crime clusters in some microgeographies and advocates for devoting extra police attention to these areas (Groff et al., 2010; Sherman and Buerger, 1989). Research continues to lend support to the concept that, just as a small number of individuals are often the source of a large portion of violent crimes in cities (Farrington & Welsh, 2006; Wolfgang, 1973), a few neighborhoods are often the source of large portions of violent crimes (Weisburd, 2015). However, the use of algorithms and predictive models to police these individuals and areas is new (Brayne & Christin, 2021). Judges are using algorithms to predict whether defendants are likely to commit another crime, and police are using them to predict the location of future crimes. The problem is that these predictive models seem to be susceptible to feedback loops, where any bias in victim reports or police arrests is written into the data and subsequently the predictive algorithm (Brantingham et al., 2018). There is evidence that the system “memorizes” certain areas as “hot-spots” (or prediction areas) and produces further arrests in that area (Ferguson, 2017).

Whether or not algorithms are used to adequately target high crime areas, the policing practice forces officials to formally identify “violent cities,” “violent communities,” “violent neighborhoods,” “violent zip codes,” or “violent areas.” Labeling spaces—hot-spots—in this way has seeped into political and popular discussions. The language insinuates that they are not communities experiencing high rates of violence but instead are inherently violent.

In 2005, the National Institutes of Justice (NIJ) provided guidance (Eck et al., 2005) to localities attempting to implement hot-spot policing, and in 2008 an article in the inaugural issue of *Geography and Public Safety* was devoted to the practice (Filbert, 2008). These have become the go-to documents for many local municipalities. In the document, the NIJ notes that spatially mapping crime and violence “points to clustering of high values (hot-spots), low values (cold-spots), and medium values (pg. 56).” However, cold-spots do not receive further attention in that document, police practice, or scholarly circles. It is no wonder, then, that so much of our formal intervention efforts, general discussion, and academic understanding of these areas focus on deficits and shortcomings in this area.

Attention to hot-spots of crime may be necessary, but it is not sufficient. Hot-spots may be the proper focus for police or others tasked with responding to violence after it has already started to cluster in specific communities (Telep & Hibdon, 2018). The cold-spots, however, hold the most promise for those looking for factors that might prevent the emergence of consistently “violent areas.” Although previous studies have identified and integrated cold and cool/warm spots into research focusing on hot spots, none of these studies are designed to explore or understand the cold spots themselves (St. Jean, 2008; Weisburd et al., 2018). This paper serves as an initial, in-depth description of some areas of concentrated disadvantage in Indianapolis, IA that are also cold-spots for adolescent violence. Our description is guided by existing theory in demography, geography, and criminology, but we take a grounded approach to identify patterns and distinguish areas of difference.

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Setting

The study focuses on block groups in Indianapolis, IN. Between 2012 and 2017, when we collected the data, Indianapolis was the 17th largest city in the nation with a larger population than Seattle, Denver, or Washington DC. In 2017, more than one out of every four Indianapolis residents (28%) were Black, and one in ten (10%) were Latinx. While only 13% of people lived in poverty in the United States, 17.5% of Indianapolis residents reported incomes below the poverty line. Six percent of the Indianapolis population was unemployed (US Census Bureau, 2019).

Indianapolis, Indiana is an example of the mid-sized Rust Belt city that have come to dominate the list of US cities grappling with high rates of violence. After 6 consecutive years of rising murder rates, Indianapolis was number 12 on the list of cities with the highest violent crime rate in 2016. In that year, Indianapolis neighborhoods

experienced 1374 violent crimes per 100,000 residents, including 148 homicides. For comparison, there were 386.3 violent crimes per 100,000 inhabitants throughout the United States (US Department of Justice, 2017).

3.2 | Sample

The Polis Center in Indianapolis has created one of the largest community information systems in the nation. We used this data information system, called SAVI, to find violence-resilient neighborhoods in Indianapolis. First, we identified census block groups experiencing concentrated disadvantage. The concentrated disadvantage measure is a composite score of 2010 block group level poverty-related variables that are often difficult to examine independently because of multicollinearity (Chamberlain & Hipp, 2015; Sampson et al., 1997). Our measure of concentrated disadvantage represents averaged z-scores of the percent of residents in poverty, percent unemployed, percent single parent, percent nonwhite, and percent receiving public assistance. Based on this information, 127 block groups out of the 632 total block groups (the top 20%) were identified as areas of concentrated disadvantage.

Next, we examined adolescent violence statistics over 5 years (between 2008 and 2012) within areas of concentrated disadvantage. Adolescent violence included juvenile offense charges for battery, gun crimes, intimidation, murder, rape, sexual battery, and manslaughter. We define resilient neighborhoods as areas of concentrated disadvantage that, according to juvenile charge data on offense address, experienced no more than one act of adolescent violence within its borders each year. Based on these criteria, there were 19 adolescent violence-resilient neighborhoods—or pockets of peace—within Indianapolis' 127 areas of concentrated disadvantage. Hence, our sample consists of 19 pockets of peace and 108 comparison areas.

3.3 | Data

The data for this study come from three sources. First, we created a database of secondary, quantitative data. The database includes variables at the block group and census tract levels detailing information on demographic and socioeconomic conditions (from the US Census American Community Survey data), juvenile and adult arrests (Marion County Juvenile Justice data and Uniform Crime Report data), housing characteristics (FFEIC Housing data and HUD Aggregated USPS data on Housing Vacancies), and neighborhood institutions (SAVI indicators for community development corporations, places of worship, libraries, schools, playgrounds, and community centers).

Second, the research team collected qualitative data using a method that we call “roving.” “Roving listeners” and “roving interpreters” are a mainstay within the practice of Asset Based Community Development (Calgario et al., 2020; Lindau et al., 2011; Yowonske & Downey, 2017). Rovers discover citizens' gifts, passions, and talents in communities, and they attempt to find ways to utilize these gifts in community development efforts. This study is characterized, in general, as the practice of “deep listening” and “positive deviance” from the typical models of neighborhood organizing. A group of residents who self-identify as roving listeners became paid members of the research team and gathered data about neighborhood assets and social processes in Indianapolis neighborhoods with concentrated disadvantages.

Although the technique varied slightly, Moore and Woodcraft (2019) integrated citizen scientists on their team in a very similar fashion to our rovers: 10 local residents gathered data by conducting “walking ethnographies,” systematic social observations, interviews, and group discussions. Our rovers were also citizen scientists (Strasser et al., 2019) who spent time in public spaces, gathered stories, and documented their observations. These team members were blinded, meaning that other team members told them that every area they were visiting was a pocket of peace. They were assigned to spend time in both a pocket and its closest comparison area (identified using closest-neighbor propensity score matching). After completing one day of roving in the assigned geographic

region, the rovers met with another research team member and participated in a semistructured interview. Transcriptions of these interviews provided nearly 600 pages worth of qualitative data.

Third, we recruited 28 young men aged 16–19 to participate in a “cell phone diary” study.¹ Twelve of the young men were from pockets of peace, and 16 were from other areas of concentrated disadvantage. These young men completed semistructured interviews, enrollment and exit surveys, and biweekly “diaries” via Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA). Health researchers have used EMA to study various health issues among adolescents (Hensel et al., 2016; Shiffman, 2009; Silk et al., 2011). In EMA, participants respond to a preprogrammed survey on a cellular phone at specific times or intervals.

In our case, participants were prompted to fill out a survey every Thursday and Sunday evening over 3 months. The survey asked whether participants had engaged in violence or almost engaged in violence but decided not to. If they answered “yes,” participants were asked to answer a series of questions about that situation. If they answered “no,” participants were directed to another module of questions about urban hassles, which required a similar amount of time to complete. The alternative module guarded against underreporting violence to shorten the time spent on the survey.

3.4 | Analysis

We used what Castro et al. (2010) refer to as a concurrent, integrative, and unified approach to combine findings from all three collection methods. In other words, although the data were gathered sequentially (in the order described here), they were analyzed simultaneously. Any finding that emerged from one data source was then evaluated using data from the other sources.

Given that this is an exploratory study, we performed a bivariate analysis of the quantitative data using STATA SE (StataCorp, 2015). Qualitative analyses involved open coding (not confined by established constructs and concepts [Glaser, 2016]) and subsequently focused coding in Dedoose (Dedoose Version 5.0, 2019). In the first round, three team members read through overlapping sections of the qualitative data such that two people read every item. The team compiled a list of emergent themes based on these initial readings and trends observed in the initial quantitative descriptive results and developed a codebook. Second, we performed focused coding using the codebook. After three days of coding during this stage, we checked for intercoder reliability in Dedoose, which was 89%. We use pseudonyms for everyone when reporting results.

4 | FINDINGS

4.1 | Sociodemographic patterns

Pockets of peace are very similar, demographically, to other areas of concentrated disadvantage. Pockets are predominantly minority (74%), predominantly female-headed (55%), and low-income (35% poverty rate) areas with high rates of unemployment (16%). Furthermore, 8% of families in pockets of peace received public assistance benefits—which is over three times higher than the national rate. As evidenced in Table 1, there are no statistically significant differences between pockets of peace and their comparison areas in terms of these indicators of concentrated disadvantage.

Table 2 provides information about the additional sociodemographic variables we explored in an attempt to identify factors that distinguish pockets from the comparison areas. We found no difference in the racial or ethnic

¹For a more detailed description of this data collection effort, refer to Leech et al. (2019).

TABLE 1 Indicators of concentrated disadvantage within neighborhoods in the study

	Total <i>n</i> = 127 Mean (SD)	Pockets <i>n</i> = 19 Mean (SD)	Other areas <i>n</i> = 108 Mean (SD)
Percent in poverty	35% (0.14)	35% (0.15)	35% (0.14)
Percent public assistance	10% (0.07)	8% (0.07)	10% (0.07)
Percent single parent	54% (0.15)	55% (0.15)	53% (0.15)
Percent unemployed	15% (0.07)	16% (0.08)	15% (0.07)
Percent nonwhite	69% (0.27)	74% (0.25)	67% (0.25)

TABLE 2 Sociodemographic characteristics of Indianapolis neighborhoods in the study

	Total <i>n</i> = 127 Mean (SD)	Pockets <i>n</i> = 19 Mean (SD)	Other Areas <i>n</i> = 108 Mean (SD)
Population dynamics			
Percent Black	57.4% (0.292)	60.8% (0.287)	55.8% (0.295)
Percent Latino	12.4% (0.118)	11.4% (0.116)	12.9% (0.119)
Percent adolescent	15.2% (0.027)	15.6% (0.033)	15.0% (0.024)
Percent non-English	08.6% (0.128)	08.5% (0.140)	08.6% (0.122)
Homeownership rate*	41.6% (0.187)	24.6% (0.212)	44.6% (0.161)
Age-Median	31.03 (6.06)	32.00 (5.50)	30.55 (6.30)

* $p < 0.01$ according to ANOVA.

makeup of the areas, nor was there any evidence of immigrant enclaves in either area. Specifically, about 8.6% of all areas of concentrated disadvantage's adult residents reported not being proficient in English. Furthermore, we identified 11 areas where more than a third of the adults were not proficient in English: two were in pockets and nine were in other areas, proportionate to the expected distribution. Finally, there is no discernable difference in the proportion of residents in late adolescence by area of residence (16% in pockets vs. 15% overall).

Homeownership was the only statistically significant sociodemographic difference evident in our data. People living in pockets of peace were less likely to own their homes (about 25%) than people living in other areas of concentrated disadvantage (about 45%). So, we further investigated homeownership and renting in our qualitative data. Our roving data suggest that resident landlords and rental longevity might distinguish pockets from other areas of concentrated disadvantage and elaborate on the negative association between rental concentration and adolescent violence in our quantitative data.

The rovers met several landlords who also lived in the neighborhood. These landlords seemed to take pride in both their properties and their relationships with renters. Our rover described two different conversations he had with these types of landlords.

- So, I [the rover] asked him [the local resident], I said, "so what about all the dilapidated, and you know, all the rental properties?" He says, "well, you know, we have some renters. I have a neighbor down there that's renting. And they're involved." And I go, "really?" And he goes, "yea..." And then I'm like, "so who is renting the houses?"

He goes, "well, believe it or not, some of us are landlords. I'm actually getting ready to buy that house right there."

- [A local resident said] "like his house, it's a generational house" and I asked him what that meant. And he said, "well, the house I'm living in actually belonged to my granddad. And after my granddad gave it to my mom she lived there for a while, then she moved and was using it as a rental property. My family, we were doing the apartment thing and my mom yelled at us "cause she had a perfectly fine house to live in." So, he had to move in and live with the renters. His family, his cousins, the current group of people in his family that live in this area have been there for 30 years.

The first conversation helped our rover realize that even he had biases and made assumptions about renters in the area. We coded the roving data for local residents making these types of negative comments. Overall, a large majority of our codes indicating negative comments or experiences with renters came from people in areas that are not pockets of peace. For example, people who live outside of pockets made the following statements.

- Yeah, he said it was predominantly renters and they don't look out for... they don't treat this stuff like it is theirs.
- The guy, the tall one that was nice, says that he thought there were too many renters. He said that there is always a six month to one year turnover, and you've got new faces.
- She said [rentals] are easy to spot because those are the houses that you would see that are not as well cared for.

Residents' comments outside of pockets echo the typical academic depiction of renters as transient and less invested in the neighborhood than homeowners. However, the commentary about renters in pockets of peace revealed a more nuanced view. Over two-thirds of the positive codes in our data were gathered in pockets of peace. Many of these positive codes represented nonchalant statements indicating that renters are regular neighbors, such as "I [the rover] asked her about the rental people and she says, 'well, when they come they blend in.' The feel I got from her was she feels safe and happy." Similar to the "generational house" described by the landlord above, other positive statements indicated that continual renting for many years or even through generations may be common in pockets of peace. For example, one of the rovers described his interaction with a middle-aged woman in a pocket of peace:

She was talking to a guy who was sitting on the tailgate of a truck... I approached them and I started talking to her. She has been there for three years and the guy sitting on the tailgate was her landlord... He says a slumlord, he is absolutely not. Most of his renters have rented from him for a long time. He said he has people who have rented from him for 7 years.

4.2 | Geographic patterns

According to this paper's definition, the vast majority of Indianapolis' 632 block groups are "peaceful." Almost two out of every three neighborhoods in Indianapolis avoid adolescent violence each year. But if we think of Indianapolis as two distinct cities, in the vein of John Edward's two Americas (one socioeconomically advantaged and the other disadvantaged), then the "two out of three" masks very different realities.

In privileged Indianapolis, peace is the norm: 79% of these geographic areas average less than one act of adolescent violence annually. In contrast, in under-resourced Indianapolis, only 15% of the geographic areas are peaceful. Between 2008 and 2012, under-resourced neighborhoods in Indianapolis experienced about one act of adolescent violence every other month (an average of 5.6 per year). During this period, the total number of charges for adolescent violence in these neighborhoods ranged from 2 to 248.

On a map, Indianapolis resembles a large square with a horizontal ribbon of concentrated disadvantage adorning its middle (with a few fraying strands). Pockets of peace are distributed somewhat evenly throughout this ribbon. They are not, for example, located primarily on the edges of the ribbon. Statistical analysis indicates no significant difference on average geographic size, but pockets are slightly smaller at about five square blocks compared to others that average seven square blocks.²

Every pocket of peace we studied borders at least one other area of concentrated disadvantage, whereas five areas that are not pockets are wholly surrounded by neighborhoods that are not under-resourced. On average, each area of concentrated disadvantage shares two borders with other areas of concentrated disadvantage. When focusing specifically on proximity to more socioeconomically advantaged areas, the location and distribution of pockets of peace are comparable to the location and distribution of the other regions of concentrated disadvantage.

Our qualitative data reinforces this statistical description of these pockets' close geographical relationship with other areas of concentrated disadvantage. On one of our roving trips, the rover noticed an officer in a parking lot. Officer Patrick patrols the whole zone around the pocket of peace, and he says the zone "gets the most calls as far as runs for the police throughout the whole state." But when the rover showed him the pocket of peace on a map, Officer Patrick said, "this area is actually the best area in this whole vicinity. Right over here, I mean that's nice. Now if you go outside of this area you don't know what to expect." The officer pointed three block faces away on the map and said, "some guy was shot over there," and then he pointed to the north border of the area and said, "there's a lot of riff-raff that goes on in the apartments down this way."

4.3 | Criminological patterns

Residents of pockets do not seem to have a uniquely positive relationship with the Indianapolis Marion County Police Department or individual officers. This particular finding is the result of triangulation across several pieces of data. First, juvenile justice statistics indicate that adolescents arrested in Indianapolis' pockets of peace are not charged with crimes most typical of adolescents throughout the United States. Nationwide, the top three juvenile charges are larceny/theft, simple assault, and drug abuse violations (US Department of Justice, 2019). In Indianapolis's areas of concentrated disadvantage, the most common charges are runaway, battery, and disorderly conduct. In pockets of peace, none of the top three charges are for violence: runaway, resisting law enforcement, and burglary. Resisting law enforcement is a charge unique to Indiana and is often seen as a catchall charge that is used to support racial profiling. The charge can be leveraged against people for resisting an officer or someone helping an officer, interfering with an officer carrying out their duties, or fleeing from an officer.

Second, the young men in our study described a hierarchical, distant, and distrusting relationship with the police across all areas of disadvantage, including in pockets of peace. Our rovers heard many stories from both residents and police officers that painted a picture of police officers at odds with residents. Although they may want the same thing—safe, thriving spaces—police, and local residents treat each other as opposing forces. Andy's story, below, is typical of the stories residents in pockets of peace share that provide evidence of a combative relationship with police officers.

It was late summer. There was a car that was stolen at 76th and Kepler. The kids drove up 79th street, ditched the car and ran into my back alley and broke into my garage and hid in the rafters. There were cops all around and, you know, I just hear these sirens keep getting closer and closer and closer. And I threw some shorts on and went outside on my porch and, you know, smoked a cigarette.

²Because these are small geographic areas, we have not included a map indicating the exact location of pockets of peace within Indianapolis. Including a map could put participant confidentiality in jeopardy and contribute to the labeling and stigmatizing of spaces.

There was this cop down there on this corner and he jumped out of his car and got behind the door and says, "go in your house or I'll shoot you!" And I took a drag of my cigar and I was like "I'm good bitch! Because I'm not going fuckin' anywhere!"

From the officers' perspective, there is also a contentious relationship. Police officer Joseph provided this description when we spoke with him in an area that is not a pocket of peace.

[Pointing toward a block nearby.] All those apartments and public housing were military and the problem started when the military left. There was a vacuum and they had to fill it with whatever was available. And what was available was not good. If you look at the timeline, you will be able to confirm what I'm telling you.

There was an apartment complex that was at the corner of 12th and Park. It was a massive apartment right there that is now closed, abandoned. After that place closed our radios went quiet... Dude there were shootings, you'd get a run and it was anybody in the neighborhood, any of us guys that were out there we get a call to that [building] and it was all cars, because we're going to need it.

What would happen is a few of us would go to take the run and the cars following us would come in behind us facing outward. Defense. They were there pointing this way while we were facing that way, to protect us. We would have to go out on fire runs because they were shooting at the firemen. Yeah, because they were pissed off we didn't show up right away. They would start retaliating while we're trying to save their grandma from dying. It was horrid.

We also heard about a specific officer (the boys called him "Officer Blue Eyes") during interviews with young men who lived both inside and outside pockets of peace. Tony, a young man who lives in a pocket of peace, was the first to mention the officer. After we reviewed his journal, Tony's interview focused on a time that month when he almost got into a fight. At one point in the conversation, the interviewer asked him, "Have you ever been stopped by the police?"

Tony told us that "Blue Eyes" stopped him. He had encountered Blue Eyes twice. The second time, Tony was riding with a friend who "got stopped" driving home from school. Blue Eyes asked Tony for his backpack, and while he searched the bag, Blue Eyes rolled his eyes and said: "him again." Tony ended with the statement: "Blue Eyes is a dirty cop."

Later in the study, Juan gave us a more detailed description of an interaction with Blue Eyes. Juan does not live in a pocket of peace and he "had a gun charge awhile back." When his weekly journal asked Juan if he had "interacted with the police" that weekend, he replied "yes." So, in the monthly interview, we asked him to tell us more about it. Juan said:

Blue Eyes, he's a real asshole. If it's more than three of y'all in the car and you got dreads, he's stopping you. Dreads are like a magnet to the police; like everybody with dreads a criminal... Sometimes they'll pull us over just to be funny. They know me and my brothers by name because they be stopping us so much...Blue Eyes told us get out the car and searched me. Him and the other cop that pulled up later, they just let us go. But Blue Eyes always has to say somethin' stupid like "I'm glad I didn't find nothing on y'all."

[The interviewer asked Juan, "Does it bother you when this happens?"] We really don't think nothing of it; just another day in the neighborhood."

This interaction with Blue Eyes was similar to the three other interactions documented in the young men's interviews.

In sum, there is no evidence in the arrest statistics nor qualitative data that residents in pockets of peace have a uniquely positive relationship with police officers that would explain the lower rates of criminal charges for adolescent violence. All the above information indicates that the police treat residents and are treated by residents the same way whether they are inside or outside of pockets of peace. Our field notes further support this finding. For example, not one of the young men in the study could tell us the name of the resource officer who works at their school, even when we asked right after passing the officer. Also, when our rovers asked, "Who is responsible for low rates of violence here?" residents mentioned retirees, school administrators, landlords, homeowners, business owners, and formal programs, but never cited a current or retired public safety officer.

In addition to relationships with police, we investigated the role of prosocial institutions in pockets of peace. According to routine activity theory (Miro, 2014), the presence of prosocial institutions would alter the typical adolescent's daily or weekly routine to include attending religious functions, engaging in programs, or participating in extracurricular activities, resulting in fewer opportunities to engage in violence, even if they were inclined to do so. Alternatively, Wilson's work circa 1987 suggests that "extreme economic deprivation" would erode both the prosocial institutions and informal relationships that keep adolescent violence in check. In this case, the absence of prosocial institutions would not be the cause of high rates of violence, but the areas would be devoid of these institutions, nonetheless.

The data on pockets of peace in Indianapolis run contrary to these expectations. Figure 1 describes the type and number of prosocial institutions present in Indianapolis' under-resourced neighborhoods. However, these institutions are not distributed equally among pockets and nonpockets (see Figure 2). Pockets of peace, on average, have significantly fewer prosocial institutions within their borders (mean of 0.9) than the comparison areas (mean of 1.5). The average pocket of peace houses less than one prosocial institution while other areas on average contain more than one. More than a third of pockets (37%) are devoid of these institutions. In our data, this means not one place of worship, community center, school, or library exists in a sizeable number of pockets of peace. In contrast, prosocial institutions were present in the vast majority—eight out of every nine (85%)—of disadvantaged areas experiencing high rates of adolescent violence.

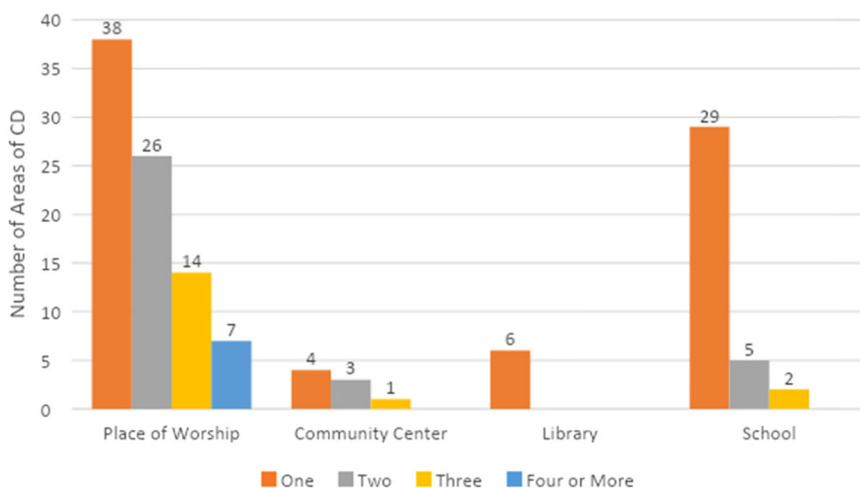


FIGURE 1 Count of prosocial institutions in areas of concentrated disadvantage by type of institution

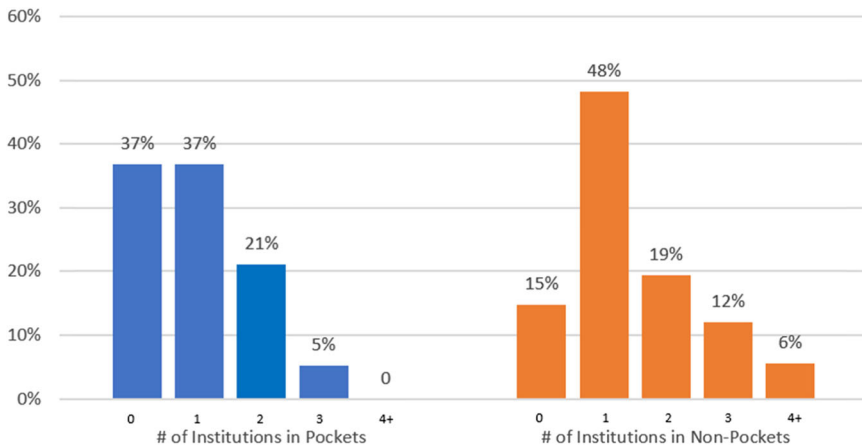


FIGURE 2 Distribution of prosocial institutions in pockets of peace and other areas of concentrated disadvantage

5 | DISCUSSION

This study has several limitations. Data collection was limited to one mid-sized city in the Midwest at a time directly following a major housing crisis and economic downturn. Our primary study subject areas experienced consistently low rates of adolescent violence over 5 years, but this strict definition resulted in a relatively small sample (19). Finally, the neighborhoods we investigated were statistically derived and did not represent the common definition of neighborhood boundaries among local residents. For all these reasons, and our stated research purpose to explore and identify, our findings should be seen as primarily hypothesis-generating and in need of further inquiry. Several patterns are worthy of further inquiry.

We found that a large majority of Indianapolis's areas of concentrated disadvantaged struggle with high rates of adolescent violence. But, an important proportion (15%) could be considered “cold spots.” The story told by these numbers echoes existing research indicating that areas of concentrated disadvantage are more likely to bear the burden of high rates of youth violence. But our finding also highlights a commonly overlooked, crucial fact: *more than one out of every 10 of Indianapolis' at-risk neighborhoods are not experiencing high rates of adolescent violence. They are violence-resilient.*

Furthermore, our findings indicate that these resilient areas are not geographic anomalies, surrounded by more advantaged areas. The work of Wilson (1987, 1991, 2011) would suggest that, compared to other areas experiencing high rates of poverty and unemployment, pockets of peace are more likely to share a border with working or middle-class neighborhoods. Over the past three decades, Wilson has produced a voluminous amount of work indicating that areas of concentrated disadvantage suffer from social and spatial isolation from working-class and middle-class adults. In turn, his research suggests that we might find pockets of peace surrounded by middle-class and working neighborhoods. However, both our qualitative and quantitative data indicate that pockets of peace should be thought of as pockets and not islands. As such, studying them might improve the ecological validity of our knowledge base, revealing more nuanced information about correlates of high rates of adolescent violence given—not controlling for—sociostructural realities.

For example, homeowners occupy a central place in conventional wisdom about stable, safe neighborhoods. They represent less transient, more permanent community members who have a financial interest in restricting harmful activities within the neighborhood (Bursik, 1988; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Furthermore, academic research indicates that homeownership is associated with civic engagement, place attachment, social cohesion, and property

maintenance, all of which are, in turn, associated with crime rates (Lindblad & Quercia, 2015; Pfeiffer & Morris, 2017).

Very few residents own their homes in Indianapolis' pockets of peace. More than three out of every four families in these areas that are resilient to adolescent violence are renters. This difference in homeownership rates was one of the few statistically significant findings in the data. Areas struggling with high rates of adolescent violence also had a high percentage of renters—more than half—but the lower rate of homeownership in pockets of peace represented one of the few statistically significant findings in our data.

The abundance of renters in pockets of peace indicates that homeownership may not be a particularly informative measure of residential stability and place attachment within areas of concentrated disadvantage, especially given that this study directly followed the housing crisis. Criminologists Lyndsay Boggess and Hipp (2010) have found that, within minority neighborhoods, homeownership does not predict violent crime, but, instead, a direct measure of residential turnover does. Historical and current racial disparities in adults' abilities to obtain and retain home mortgages may help to explain why homeownership may not accurately represent stability in that study of minority neighborhoods (Quillian et al., 2020). Similarly, the current results suggest a potentially unique relationship between homeownership and rates of violence when comparisons are made within marginalized communities where homeownership rates vary, but only on the low-end of the spectrum.

Together, the quantitative data on homeownership rates and qualitative data on resident landlords and rental longevity suggest that rental policy and practices may be more important than homeownership when focusing on marginalized communities. Some of the existing research on homeownership indicates that it leads to lower crime rates through residential stability. Furthermore, emerging research indicates that renters have similar civic, health, and educational outcomes to homeowners when renters' housing tenure is similar to homeowners' tenure (Acolin, 2020). Thus, in marginalized areas, especially those with high unemployment and a history of racist mortgage practices, we may need to develop direct indicators of residential stability rather than relying on homeownership rates.

The only other statistically significant finding, in addition to lower homeownership rates, was that fewer prosocial institutions were present in pockets of peace than in other areas. It may be that community centers are more likely to be established in areas with high rates of violence. In this case, the abundance of prosocial institutions outside of pockets of peace could be a reaction to already existing high rates of violence. However, this reasoning does not necessarily apply to the construct of prosocial institutions in our study, given the abundance of places of worship and schools included in our data.

Instead, we turn to previous findings indicating that the relationship between prosocial institutions and adolescent behavior is content and context-specific. Some of that research indicates that the quality of the programming offered is more important than the presence of the institution (Lewis et al., 2021). For example, psychologist Mahoney et al. (2001, 2004) body of work indicates that if these organizations do not offer structured activities, they run the risk of increasing adolescents' antisocial behavior—including violence—around their buildings. When offering only unstructured activities, these institutions can serve to provide opportunities for youth to engage in violence. Following up on these findings, several scholars have documented elevated rates of adolescent crime near schools, activity centers, and even libraries (Roman, 2004; Weisburd et al., 2009).

Furthermore, Osborne et al. (2016) found that in Washington DC, the number of prosocial institutions in a neighborhood is directly related to the rate of assaults with a deadly weapon (ADW), but only if the neighborhood has high rates of poverty. They explain:

concentrated poverty can have a significant influence on both crime and victimization within an area. The true depiction... rests in the last type of block group: those with a high percentage of individuals living in poverty, and many prosocial institutions located within. On average, groups falling into this category experienced just fewer than 30 incidents of ADW for the year (29.90). Considering that the

mean number of incidents for all block groups was less than 10, this figure is startling, to say the least (Osborne et al., 2016).

Our findings and these previous findings are specific to brick and mortar buildings. They do not, for example, call into question the important work produced recently by sociologist Patrick Sharkey (Sharkey, 2018; Sharkey et al., 2017). His research provides convincing evidence that nonprofits have played an essential and often overlooked role in declining crime rates—including violent crime—in US metropolitan areas. Our findings may differ from his for two reasons: he focuses on the presence of nonprofits that are designed to combat crime city-wide and not brick and mortar buildings in specific spaces and his data does not focus on youth.

Focusing specifically on youth led to an important finding regarding the relationship between community and police. The fact that “resisting law enforcement” is one of the top three juvenile charges in pockets of peace paired with the young men’s depictions of aggressive law enforcement practices suggests that adolescents living in these neighborhoods are subjected to the same hyper-surveillance that has been documented in many minority urban areas. Whether it is a result of systemic practices (e.g., proactive policing), discretionary charges (e.g., resisting law enforcement), or individual officers’ violations, adolescents in pockets of peace are just as vulnerable to increased contact with the justice system as youth residing in other areas of concentrated disadvantage. We found no evidence of uniquely positive relationships with or perceptions of police within pockets of peace. Thus, future studies may need to focus less on law enforcement and more on structural factors and informal social processes in efforts to identify distinguishing characteristics of pockets of peace.

6 | CONCLUSION

Despite the study limitations, we are able to make one definitive conclusion: pockets of peace exist and warrant further study. These areas are facing the socioeconomic, structural, and demographic situations that are commonly found in other areas of concentrated disadvantage. Nonetheless, they have successfully limited adolescent violence within their borders. Pockets of peace and neighborhoods like them present an opportunity to study community-level resilience within the real, lived context of structural disadvantage instead of using statistics to control for the context of structural disadvantage.

Many scholars and activists continue to work to address the underlying issues of marginalization that place all the neighborhoods we studied at risk for high rates of adolescent violence. That work should continue. But, given the complexity of urban neighborhoods’ socioeconomic, structural, and demographic marginalization, the reality is unlikely to change within the near future. Until the underlying inequities are addressed at the societal level, the existence of pockets of peace provides an opportunity to study them as “evidence-based programs” that can serve as examples of how entire neighborhoods can be resilient at the community level.

Shifting the resilient “actor” from the individual to the neighborhood is a new approach that can offer an important advancement to our understanding of ways to limit high rates of adolescent violence in communities. The current resilience paradigm theoretically acknowledges that adolescents’ neighborhood environment can help them to develop internal assets that keep them from enacting violence. Empirical evidence also indicates that different aspects of a neighborhood’s built-environment can restrict youth from enacting undesirable behavior (Clarke, 1997; Kitchen & Schneider, 2007). However, conceptualizing the neighborhood as the resilient actor itself moves beyond these ideas of neighborhoods’ characteristics contributing to the behavior of individual youth. The conceptualization begins from the assumption that there is a shared and distinct neighborhood or community experience. Furthermore, the *neighborhood experience* of high rates of violence among adolescents may be fundamentally distinct from the simple geographic co-location of individual acts of adolescent violence. Future research should focus on studying these pockets of peace and examine characteristics of adolescent violence-resilient neighborhoods as more than the “flip side of the coin” of risk factors.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request due to privacy/ethical restrictions.

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