

Environment affects crime gender gap

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A new study by Gregory Zimmerman finds difference between men and women in committing violent crimes is smaller in poor neighborhoods

While women in general commit far fewer violent crimes than men, a new study by a Northeastern University professor finds the difference between the genders is much smaller in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

The research on the [violent crime](#) "gender gap" appears in the December issue of the journal [American Sociological Review](#). The study, coauthored by Gregory Zimmerman, assistant professor of criminology and criminal justice at Northeastern, shows that environment plays a more significant role in women's behavior.

"This narrowing of the [gender gap](#) arises because exposure to violent peers is greater in disadvantaged neighborhoods for both males and females, but females are more strongly influenced by their peers than are males," said Zimmerman.

"Our research found that females are typically more influenced by peers because they tend to have more intimate friendships than do males. Violent peers exert a stronger influence on behavior when the relationships with these peers are more intimate," he said.

The study utilized data collected from 1994 to 2001 by the Project of Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods — an interdisciplinary study that examined how individual, family, and contextual factors contributed to youth development.

Zimmerman and his coauthor, Steven Messner of the State University of New York at Albany, say their results reaffirm the fundamental principle of feminist [criminology](#): Explaining criminal behavior and other social phenomena requires understanding of how gender shapes daily interactions, relationships and behavior patterns.

Provided by Northeastern University

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