A systematic scoping review of crime location choice studies and its spatial unit of analysis:

# Authors

# Abstract

This systematic scoping review examines the current body of research on crime location choice, focusing specifically on the decision-making processes of offenders, as analyzed through discrete choice models. By systematically reviewing the quantitative literature, this study aims to map the spatial units of analysis utilized in these studies and identify gaps in existing research. The review emphasizes the need to understand how spatial scales influence the outcomes of discrete choice models in offender decision-making. The expected outcomes include a comprehensive mapping of spatial unit usage and recommendations for standardizing spatial scales in future research.

# Introduction

Crime location choice research has evolved from focusing on larger spatial units such as cities, states, and neighborhoods (Baumer et al., 1998; Loftin & Hill, 1974) to micro-level spatial units like street segments and face blocks (Eck & Weisburd, 1995; Sampson & Groves, 1989). This shift towards micro-level analysis has been driven by the need to get better understanding of offenders' location choices. Micro-level spatial units allow for more granular insights into crime trends and offender behavior (Weisburd et al., 2004), enhancing theoretical development and enabling more precise crime prevention strategies. Despite its increasing popularity micro spatial units, there is still no consensus on how spatial scales impact findings in crime location choice research. This raises a question about the reliability and generalizability of conclusions drawn from studies focused on micro-units versus those based on larger spatial scales. Understanding these differences is crucial for advancing both criminological theory and its practical applications.

The introduction of micro place analysis marked a major shift in crime location choice research, focusing on more specific places like street segments, census blocks or grid cells (e.g., Bernasco, 2019; Bernasco et al., 2013; Bernasco & Jacques, 2015). This shift was not merely a change in the unit of analysis but provided an understanding of crime trends at the micro-level. However, there is a lack of clarity on how spatial units influence crime data and the interpretation of offender decision-making presents a challenge for developing theoretical frameworks. Understanding these influences is essential for advancing criminological theory and practical applications. Consequently, this scoping review seeks to systematically assess the use of spatial units in crime location choice studies, with a focus on quantitative analyses employing discrete choice models. By doing so, this review aims to map the spatial units of analysis used across various studies, identify gaps in the literature, and examine how different spatial scales impact the understanding of crime location choices.

Rationale for Review

Despite the significant growth of crime location choice research, there remains a lack of comprehensive reviews that focus specifically on the use of discrete choice models to explain offender decision-making. Discrete choice models offer a structured, quantitative method to analyze how offenders select targets and locations, but existing studies vary widely in their use of spatial units, from large-scale neighborhoods to individual street segments. The diversity in spatial scale also challenges the comparability and generalizability of findings across different spatial scales (Steenbeek & Weisburd, 2016; Weisburd et al., 2012).

This review aims not only to synthesize existing findings but also to make a significant contribution to the literature by critically evaluating how the choice of spatial units affects the outcomes of discrete choice models in crime location choice research. By systematically mapping and analyzing the spatial scales used in these studies. the review will:

* **Identify Inconsistencies:** Highlight inconsistencies and variations in spatial unit usage that may affect the interpretation of offender decision-making processes.
* **Assess Impact on Findings:** Examine how different spatial scales influence the results of discrete choice models, potentially leading to different conclusions about crime patterns and offender behaviors.
* **Develop Recommendations:** Offer evidence-based recommendations for selecting appropriate spatial units in future research, promoting methodological standardization.
* **Enhance Theoretical Development:** Contribute to the refinement of criminological theories by providing insights into how spatial scales interact with offender decision-making.
* **Inform Practice:** Assist practitioners in designing more effective crime prevention strategies by understanding the implications of spatial scale choices.

By addressing these aspects, the review adds value beyond mere synthesis, directly contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field and offering practical guidance for researchers and policymakers.

# **Objective**

The primary objective of this systematic scoping review is to map the varied use of spatial scales in quantitative studies that analyze crime location choices using discrete choice models or related frameworks. This review aims to examine how different spatial units, from macro-level regions to micro-level street segments, are applied in the literature. By identifying patterns in spatial scale usage, this review will highlight the strengths and limitations of different scales, offering guidance for future research and practical applications in crime prevention.

# **Methods and Analysis**

## Eligibility Criteria

* **Population:** Studies that focus on offenders’ location choice decisions across various crime types—including violent crimes, property crimes, and other offenses—with an emphasis on understanding how spatial units influence these decisions.
* **Concept:** The study must focus on the selection of locations or targets by offenders, with a particular focus on spatial scale usage in the analysis of crime location choices. This includes the use of discrete choice models or other quantitative frameworks that assess location-based decision-making.
* **Outcomes:** The study must analyze crime location choices quantitatively, specifically examining the spatial units (e.g., neighborhoods, street segments, or grid cells) employed in the analysis.
* **Study Types:** Empirical, quantitative studies that utilize discrete choice models or similar decision-making frameworks to examine crime location choices. The review will prioritize peer-reviewed journal articles.
* **Language Restrictions:** Only studies published in English will be included, which may introduce language bias and limit the generalizability of the findings.

## ****Exclusion Criteria****

* **Non-Empirical Studies:** Papers that do not involve empirical analysis, such as purely theoretical works, opinion pieces, or narrative reviews.
* **Qualitative Studies:** Studies that rely solely on qualitative methods without a quantitative analysis of spatial scales in crime location choice.
* **Irrelevant Spatial Focus:** Research that does not explicitly address the spatial dimensions of crime location choice or does not utilize spatial scales in the analysis.
* **Lack of Discrete Choice Models:** Studies that do not employ discrete choice models or other quantitative frameworks related to spatial decision-making.

# Information Sources and Search Strategy

We will search the following databases: Web of Science (WOS), Scopus, ProQuest Criminal Justice Database, and Google Scholar (first 100 results). Search terms have been pre-determined for each database as follows:

* **Web of Science**: TS=((( "location" OR "target" OR "decision-making" OR "decision making") AND ("offend\*" OR "crime\*") AND ("discrete" OR "choose" OR "choice" OR "select")))
* **Scopus**: TITLE-ABS-KEY ( noft ( ( ( "location" OR "target" OR "decision-making" OR "decision making" ) AND ( "offend\*" OR "crime\*" ) AND ( "discrete" OR "choose" OR "choice" OR "select" ) ) ) )
* **ProQuest Criminal Justice Database**: noft(((( "location" OR "target" OR "decision-making" OR "decision making") AND ("offend\*" OR "crime\*") AND ("discrete" OR "choose" OR "choice" OR "select"))))
* **Google Scholar (first 100 results)**: ((( "location" OR "target" OR "decision-making" OR "decision making") AND ("offend\*" OR "crime\*") AND ("discrete" OR "choose" OR "choice" OR "select")))

Search results will be filtered for peer-reviewed studies published in English, focusing on quantitative approaches.

# Study Selection

Eligibility criteria will guide the selection process. Two independent reviewers will screen the titles, abstracts, and full texts, resolving discrepancies through discussion.

# Data Extraction

The following data will be extracted from each study:

* **Study Details:** Title, authors, year of publication, and country.
* **Sample Characteristics:** Sample size and type of offender/crime.
* **Unit of Analysis:** Level of analysis (e.g., individuals, neighborhoods, street segments) and size of spatial scale.
* **Geographical Context:** Urban, suburban, or rural settings.
* **Methodological Approach:** Type of discrete choice model used (e.g., multinomial logit, nested logit) and any spatial regression techniques.
* **Findings:** Main results, spatial and temporal characteristics.

# Synthesis and Presentation

Results will be synthesized narratively and presented using tables and figures. A PRISMA flow diagram will be included to illustrate the selection process. Findings will be grouped based on the size of the spatial unit of analysis.

# **Conclusion**

This systematic scoping review will map the varied use of spatial scales in crime location choice studies, focusing on quantitative research employing discrete choice models. By identifying the strengths and limitations of different spatial units in explaining offenders’ location choices, the review aims to highlight key gaps in the literature. The findings will offer recommendations for standardizing spatial scales in future research and provide insights that could inform more effective crime prevention strategies.