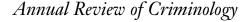
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Does Nothing Stop a Bullet Like a Job? The Effects of Income on Crime

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Annu. Rev. Criminol. 2025. 8:269-89

The Annual Review of Criminology is online at criminol.annualreviews.org

https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-111523-

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Keywords

crime, violence, income, jobs, social policy, social programs

Abstract

Do jobs and income-transfer programs affect crime? The answer depends on why one is asking the question, which shapes what one means by "crime." Many studies focus on understanding why overall crime rates vary across people, places, and time; because 80% of all crimes are property offenses, that is what this type of research typically explains. But if the goal is to understand what to do about the crime problem, the focus should instead be on serious violent crimes, which the best available estimates suggest seem to account for the majority of the social costs of crime. The best available evidence suggests that policies that reduce economic desperation reduce property crime (and, hence, overall crime rates) but have little systematic relationship to violent crime. The difference in impacts arguably stems in large part from the fact that most violent crimes, including murder, are not crimes of profit but rather crimes of passion, including rage. Policies to alleviate material hardship, as important and useful as those are for improving people's lives and well-being, are not by themselves sufficient to also substantially alleviate the burden of violent crime on society.