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Crime in Urban Areas

The pandemic has impacted the world in numerous ways that several generations have not observed. One of the crucial impacts of it is visible in the form of increased crime rates. Several factors, like unemployment, decreased policing, and social unrest due to the pandemic, have increased crime rates. Simultaneously, the criminalization and discrimination of already stigmatized groups, which include those who are poor, use drugs, or have mental health disorders, have deepened the health disparities. Minorities, particularly, are impacted by these factors and suffer injustice. Amidst the pandemic, the crime rate in urban areas, as well as the racial injustice against the minority, has increased substantially.

At the time when the pandemic started to spread across New York and the number of subway riders decreased, the felony and misdemeanor crime rates decreased significantly. The crime rate dropped by nearly forty percent between January and September compared to last year. However, according to the news article by Goldbaum, even though the overall crime rate has decreased, the prevalence of violent crimes and vandalism has increased. This issue is seriously concerning for those who avail of the services of the public transport system. A sense of fear is developed among the passengers who are exposed to the risk of being targeted by

violence and criminal activities (Goldbaum)¹. Currently, the rate of reported burglaries, rapes, homicides, and robberies committed in the subway is much higher at this time as compared to the same time last year. This observation is based on the statistics gathered by the Police Department, and according to transit officials, vandalism incidents have increased (Goldbaum). It can be concluded from this article that the crime rate in the subways has increased after two decades of a stable decline in crimes.

According to the data gathered by NYPD, the rate of hate crimes has increased significantly, and the NYPD recorded 206 hate crimes between January 01 and September 27. In these circumstances, the rise of hate crimes against Asians concerning COVID-19 was not surprising (Chapman)². Another news article published that the crime rate has increased unevenly after the orders for stay-at-home were lifted, and the racial disparity is at its peak this year. The statistics show that the crime rate remained stable in the white majority. This year, the incident of the death of seventeen children at minimum at St. Louis shocked the nation. It highlighted the broadening racial crime difference in that city during the coronavirus pandemic. The increase in crime continues. However, the gap between the rates of violence in Black and

¹ Goldbaum, Christina. "In Empty Subways, Violent Crime Is Rising." *The New York Times*, 12 Oct. 2020.

NYTimes.com, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/12/nyregion/nyc-crime-subway.html>.

² Chapman, Shan Li and Ben. "NYPD Forms Asian Hate Crime Task Force." *Wall Street Journal*, 18 Oct. 2020.

www.wsj.com, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nypd-forms-asian-hate-crime-task-force-11603040400>.

White communities is broadened by 106 percent in the country's largest cities (Harden et al.)³.

Because of systemic racism, it has been observed that black people have been excessively impacted by mass incarceration and the COVID-19 pandemic (Macmadu et al.)⁴. Almost one-third of Black men will possibly experience imprisonment in their lifetime. In contrast, the black communities face higher COVID-19 cases and mortality compared to the White populations.

The analysis of twenty-seven cities conducted by the Washington Post showed that the progressing rate of violent crimes decreased by thirty-per cent in the neighborhood of the White majority while the stay-at-home orders were enforced. It was almost equal to the lowest crime rate achieved in two years. After the orders were lifted, the rate of violent crimes returned to the levels before the pandemic. However, it stayed less as compared to 2019 and 2018. On the other hand, the rate of violence continued to be relatively steady during the stay-at-home orders imposed in majority-Black neighborhoods. However, they increased dramatically after the order was lifted. Several cases of police brutality surfaced during the pandemic, and protests were held by the supporters of the 'Black Lives Matter movement. The protesters and leaders from the large cities have supported utilizing the funds for mental health services and drug treatments instead of offering them to the police departments. They argue that minority communities have been policed more than was required for a long time. They suggest that social

³ Harden, John D., et al. "Crime Rose Unevenly When Stay-at-Home Orders Lifted. The Racial Disparity Is the Widest in Years." *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/local/public-safety/crime-rate-coronavirus/>. Accessed 19 Oct. 2020.

⁴ Macmadu, Alexandria, et al. "COVID-19 and Mass Incarceration: A Call for Urgent Action." *The Lancet Public Health*, vol. 0, no. 0, Elsevier, Oct. 2020. www.thelancet.com, doi:10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30231-0.

services can address the issues much better. The issues in the Black communities have risen regarding how they would survive amid the unrest due to racial disparity, an economic collapse, and health concerns due to the pandemic. One of the examples of the suffering is of the family of Victrail Mora, who was shot and killed in St. Louis. At the same time, his father had contracted coronavirus during his incarceration.

A widespread local shooting has been observed in a major city during the pandemic. The police department is now taking action and data-driven measures to protect the communities from armed repeat offenders and violent gang members. According to Acting Eastern District U.S. Attorney Seth DuCharme, this will help to prevent public housing and neighborhoods from being targeted by the prevalent violence (Kessler)⁵. The government, consequently, is taking actions to reduce the crime rate, especially directed toward some specific races. Recently the New York Police Department decided to form an Asian Hate Crime Task Force devoted to investigating criminal activities that target one race. According to NYPD, the crime rate targeting Asians in New York has increased since the pandemic started (Chapman). The task force will consist of 25 Asian descent detectives who can speak nine Asian languages. The objective of this group is to guide the victims about actions to be taken and the procedure of the justice system, starting from reporting any criminal activity to prosecution (Chapman). According to the Police Department, it is determined that the task force will continue to operate even after the pandemic. In addition to this, to control the increasing crime rate, a

⁵ Kessler, Robert E. "Feds, NYPD Announce Crackdown on Violent City Crime." *Newsday*,

special team of Brooklyn's federal prosecutors will prosecute more gun cases from the state prosecutors (Hong)⁶. This means the defendants will face more strict prison sentences in these cases. This might impact black offenders more as compared to white offenders.

Discussion and Comments

As it is known that the virus's origin is possibly China, it has inspired some people to unreasonably believe that there is a link between the Asian-American race and the virus. This may be due to the prevailing racism and irrational perception ingrained in American society. According to criminologists and police officers, it is difficult to identify the causes behind the divergence because the relation between the forces driving this crime rate is complex, particularly in this year of unparalleled turmoil. The increase in the crime rate in the Back neighborhood is concerning. This trend may be influenced by the pandemic and the police brutality cases that left the black communities more exposed to criminal activities. It is also possible that Black communities have experienced more societal issues due to decreased active efforts to combat crime. It is because the police departments have started to focus on maintaining social distancing, battling the pandemic, and quarantining sick officers. In addition, there is a probability that cases like that of George Floyd have influenced the black communities to report crimes lesser as well as take part lesser in investigations. These factors could have allowed the societal problems against the minor communities to fester. Criminal activities and violence have fueled a debate on the driving factors of these circumstances. Due to the pandemic and

⁶ Hong, Nicole. "U.S. Attorney Moves In on Brooklyn D.A.'s Territory, Citing Crime Surge." *The New York Times*, 14 Oct. 2020. *NYTimes.com*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/14/nyregion/nyc-federal-prosecutors-gun-violence.html>.

collapsing economic situation of several small businesses and large corporations, there is a huge decrease in the job market, and numerous employees have lost the means to earn bread. The step to forming the task force will expectantly improve the situation and offer a certain comfort level to the victims. It was extremely necessary to form the task force as twenty-three incidents were reported regarding the coronavirus hate crimes at the NYPD. As a result, a separate category was formed this year to track crimes that target based on the perception that a certain race is linked to Covid-19. There is a need for the government to pay attention to those who suffer unjustly, or else one issue will lead to another.

Conclusion

From the research standpoint, it appears that even after almost a year of the pandemic, it is difficult to form a comprehensive and ascertained decision regarding the impact of racial injustice and the pandemic on the crime rate. However, it is obvious from several steady signs across the country that the rate of certain crimes has increased drastically during the pandemic. The research reveals that the highest increases are observed in violent crimes, which include murder and aggravated assault. Due to increased crimes, the passengers and residents no longer feel safe in their communities. Another influential factor associated with the crime rate and pandemic is the racial injustice ingrained in American society. The government must take reasonable actions to maintain peace and order in society.

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