SOCIAL STRESS IN THE UNITED STATES

Links to Regional Patterns in Crime and Illness

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SOCIAL STRESS in the UNITED STATES

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Arnold S. Linsky and Murray A. Straus

Stress and behavior have been linked at the individual level for some time. Now, the authors of Social Stress in the United States demonstrate that this relationship, with its significant implications, exists on a societal level as well. Social scientists, demographers, public health officials, and state government officials throughout the country who are concerned about the social aspects of stress will find this book responsive to their needs.

The two distinguished, highly experienced sociologist authors present a new aid to understanding the problem: The "State Stress Index" (SSI). Their composite index is based on the frequency of fifteen separate indicators covering a wide array of stressful events involving the family, the economy, and the community. Each of the fifty states and nine regions of the country are compared for stressfulness of their social environments. This approach, which integrates the "sociological" tradition and the "life events" approach to studying stress, demonstrates that the higher the level of social stress in a given locale, the higher the level of maladaptive behavior and crime. The state-to-state and regional differences in the stressfulness of life as measured by the State Stress Index are an important indicator of one aspect of the quality of life in different parts of the United States. But this section of the book also sets the stage for the later chapters which look at the consequences of this spatial patterning of stressors for the residents of each state.

In these chapters the focus is on the correlation between state stress levels of crime and maladaptive behavior—alcoholism, asthma, accidents, heavy smoking, suicide—and a number of illnesses such as heart disease, ulcers, and tuberculosis. In the final chapter the authors examine the relationship between individual and community levels of stress and consider some practical applications and implications of their index.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Arnold S. Linsky is professor of Sociology at The University of New Hampshire. He was co-director of the First (1982) and Second (1986) National Conferences on Social Stress Research and is a former chairperson of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

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