

Crime Statistics and Prevention

Problem Statement

The Wilmington Housing Authority (WHA) recently became interested in studying the many problems that exist in public housing. Public housing offers the indigent a place to live with minimal or no income. The population is mostly African American, single mothers, with little or no income. WHA received money from a grant and allocated it to "crime prevention." Jim Vaughn, a retired FBI agent and private investigator, was contracted to study the crime problem in public housing.

I started working with Jim in January. He had been there for approximately six months. He presented statistics to the Board of Commissioners at the January Crime and Public Safety committee meeting. They were alarmed by the number of domestic violence calls and wanted to find out more information about these incidents. It was then my job to develop a system where we could find out what had happened and who was involved. Thus hoping to offer a solution to the problem.

Literature Review

Before working with WHA, I was somewhat skeptical in entering an environment in which I had never been in. This fear stemmed from what I had read and seen in the local newspaper and news broadcasts. The public sees public housing as a metaphor for violence, drugs, prostitution, and crime. Yes, these things do happen; but they happen in other parts of the community also. The majority of people in the community also believe that the preponderance of people in public housing participate in illegal activities. The truth is that there are people who participate in illegal activities, but most are trying to better themselves and want to “move up and out.”

Having little knowledge about public housing and domestic violence, I focused my literature review on these two topics.

Concepts and Theory in the Literature on Public Housing and Domestic Violence

Piquero (1999) describes “incivility” as a disorder. He sees it as an unrefined and threatening behavior that disturbs life, especially urban life (public housing). He also uses the initials: NEPHU. This stands for Narcotics Enforcement in Public Housing Unit, which was established by the Denver Police Department. He uses the “incivilities thesis” which states that residents who perceive more “clues” to the underlying level of disorder in their immediate environment feel more vulnerable and thus more fearful of crime and victimization. Some social signs of incivility include: public drinking or drunkenness, drug abuse, drug sales, “hey honey” hassles, and children out of control.

Weisz and Tolman (2000) use “severe violence” as a life threatening risk which was indicated when three or more episodes of domestic violence occurred in the past year. There were also three or more criteria from a list of eighteen which could have taken place with these incidents. Some of these criteria were police involvement, drug abuse, extreme male dominance, abuse of a child, violence outside the family, and frequent verbal aggression. They believe that the best predictors of domestic violence are empirically derived risk factors and survivors’ predictions in assessing danger and trying to reduce the risks to battered women.

Lastly, Weis, Fine, and Christmas (1999) use the term “meaningful urban community.” This consists of churches, literacy centers, work places, etc. which offers services and support to urban residents. This article looked at the stresses and strengths that define daily negotiated life experiences for women who are poor or working class and African American.

Methods in the Literature on Public Housing and Domestic Violence

Data from the three articles were all obtained differently. Piquero (1999) examined police responses to drugs in two public housing developments in Denver, Colorado. Weisz and Tolman (2000) used secondary data analysis comparing the accuracy of 177 domestic violence survivors’ predictions of re-assault to risk factors supported by previous research. They also looked at the effectiveness of court ordered battered treatments and compared these to women’s predictions. Weis, Fine, and Christmas (1999) interviewed 154 individuals in two segments.

Results in the Literature on Public Housing and Domestic Violence

There are many different conclusions that can be drawn from these three articles. Piquero (1999) suggests that residents' perceptions and on-site assessments of incivilities have an impact on the community's perception of crime and its effect on the relationship between residents in the community. As social and physical incidents proliferate, residents perceive more problems in the locale and loose confidence in the neighborhood and in the ability of the police to prevent or control unlawful behavior. Weisz and Tolman (2000) support the use of both empirically derived risk variables and survivors' predictions in the assessment of danger to victims of domestic violence and other women. Weis, Fine, and Christmas found that the proximity of houses and neighborhoods make domestic violence a community event. This threatens the safe space created in response to external violence.

Methods

Research Question and Hypotheses

How prevalent is domestic violence in WHA and who is involved in these incidents? I believe that the highest percentage of domestic violence will occur with men violating women. After reading the literature, it seems that this type of violence happens most often.

Data Collection Techniques

Measurement

By obtaining 911 calls from the Wilmington Police Department (WPD) each month for the year 2000 and 2001, I could see where domestic violence calls were made. These reports came by development, with the incident number, nature of call (domestic disturbance), date, time, street address, location (Taylor Homes), caller name, and the close (arrest, report, took information, etc.).

After I received the reports, I made copies and distributed them to the managers. The managers were then to have meetings with the residents who had incidents. Managers were not to force information, but to simply offer help. This was done to try to help the resident, while also obtaining information. Many of the managers were already familiar with the incidents.

They would then place a mark on the table, representing who was involved and what had happened (male on female).

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
M-M													
M-F													
F-F													
F-M													
CHILD													
UNK													
TOTALS													

M-M: Male on Male
 M-F: Male on Female
 F-F: Female on Female
 F-M: Female on Male
 Child: Child Involved
 UNK: Unknown (moved out of housing, unable to locate, etc.)

Sampling

This study was done on only those involved with domestic violence in public housing. Further, it involved only those in public housing who had called 911 to receive assistance with an incident.

Length of Data Collection

This process took approximately three months. From February until April I distributed the 2001 reports and talked to the managers about getting the proper information for the 2000 study to give to the Board of Commissioners. Jim had already given the managers the data for the year 2000, so I was mainly concerned on making sure they were calling in the residents and documenting there meetings.

Role of Researcher

I gathered and processed all the data for the domestic violence study, minus distributing the 2000 reports which Jim gave the managers before I began my work with WHA. I also documented all the reports I gave the managers and kept these in a binder for future reference when talking to individuals who asked what I was “doing.” I tried to be friendly, but professional at all times.

Ethics

Confidentiality was somewhat a problem because names and addresses were obtained from the 911 data. Residents were then sent memos or called by managers requesting them to come talk and offering help. Even though this information was ONLY used for study purposes, residents could feel as though their privacy was disturbed.

Results for the Year 2000

Nesbitt Courts

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL	
M-M									2				2	3%
M-F	4	1	1	1	2	1	3	1	2	1	2	13	32	54%
F-F			1					1					2	3%
F-M							1						1	1%
CHILD		1	2					1			1	1	6	10%
UNK	1		1		2	1	2	1		2	1	5	16	27%
TOTAL	5	2	5	1	4	2	6	4	4	3	4	19	59	

Creekwood

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL	
M-M						1							1	1%
M-F	5	1	6	4	7	7	4	7	7	8	2	2	60	64%
F-F	1								1		1	1	4	4%
F-M											1		1	1%
CHILD			1					1	1		1	3	7	7%
UNK	3	1	3	3	4	1				1	1	3	20	21%
TOTAL	9	2	10	7	11	9	4	8	9	9	6	9	93	

Vesta Village

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL	
M-M														
M-F								2		2	1		5	55%
F-F														
F-M														
CHILD				1		1							2	22%
UNK								1		1			2	22%
TOTALS				1		1		3		3	1		9	

Hillcrest

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL	
M-M					1		1		1				3	6%
M-F	1	2			1	1	2	4	2	2	2		17	34%
F-F				2							1		3	6%
F-M				2	1							1	3	6%
CHILD	3			4	2			1		1	1		13	26%
UNK	1	2	1	1	3				2		1		11	22%
TOTALS	5	4	1	9	8	1	3	5	5	3	5	1	50	

Rankin

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
M-M													
M-F						1				1			2
F-F													
F-M													
CHILD													
UNK											1	1	3
TOTALS						1				1		1	3

Houston Moore

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
M-M							1		1	1			3
M-F	2	6	6	5	3	5	7	7	2	10	1	5	59
F-F								1				2	3
F-M		1											1
CHILD	1		1				2					1	5
UNK		1	3	1			2	2	1	1			11
TOTALS	3	8	10	6	3	5	10	12	4	12	1	8	82

Taylor Homes

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
M-M			2	1		1	4			1		1	10
M-F	2	3	18	6	9	2	8	5	7	4	4	7	75
F-F			2	2	2	2	3	4	1	1	2		19
F-M				1	1						2	1	5
CHILD	2				2					1			5
UNK	1	2	2	4		2	2	1	1	2		1	18
TOTALS	5	5	24	14	14	7	17	10	9	9	8	10	132

TOTALS:

			Without UNK (-349)
M-M	19	4%	5%
M-F	250	58%	71%
F-F	31	7%	8%
F-M	11	2%	5%
Child	38	8%	10%
UNK	79	18%	
Total:	428		

Discussion

Limitations

I honestly believe this study had an abundance of limitations. The first problem was that some of the information was over a year old, so residents had moved out and were unable to locate, or they had “forgotten” what had happened.

Some managers also seemed to be a problem. Many were hesitant to call in the residents. With the few that did talk to residents, specific ones didn’t document the meetings, thus “forgetting” what had happened. Managers are overworked, so I feel they viewed this study as something that was unimportant. It took Jim and I going to the developments and sitting with the managers every week to get information from them. On a couple of occasions, I had to re-copy the 911 data so they would have the reports because they had lost the first copy I gave them. We also had to sit with a few of the managers and go through each month, with each case, to fill in the table. This should have not had to have been done. I feel that some of the managers did not do an accurate job in obtaining information and helping with this study.

Another problem I had to encounter was an administration change in the WHA. The executive director, Alan Jones, retired. Two interim directors were then hired to find an executive director and make management changes. Managers were then relocated to different developments, unfamiliar with the residents. This then became a trust issue with the residents not trusting the new managers.

Conclusion

As one can see, there is a problem with domestic violence in the WHA. With 71% being male on female, something needs to be done. The managers and I attended a

seminar on domestic violence on March 20, 2001. This seminar dealt with how to acknowledge domestic violence and where to send residents to receive help. I feel that this was not enough training for the managers. Do to time, this was all that could be done. I am hoping that with my help, the WHA can build a better rapport with the New Hanover County Health Department and the Domestic Violence shelter so we can work hand in hand in solving this problem.

My Final Thoughts

I thoroughly enjoyed doing this practicum. It opened my eyes to issues that I never would have had to even think about. It has changed my views on the indigent and what needs to be done in public housing to make it a safer place for people to live. It disappoints me that police officers are unwilling to drive through public housing at night for fear that they may be hurt. If they feel this way, then I can only imagine how other residents and especially children feel when they must stay inside when it gets dark outside.

Working with Jim was an experience in itself. He taught me more than how do to statistics. I learned facts about everything from the history of the United States and Russia to working in the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He introduced me to many influential people in the community and also in the criminal justice field. I feel honored to have been able to work beside him.

Lastly, I want to thank Dr. Price for giving me the opportunity to experience all that I have these past two semesters. I am truly grateful for her dedication to learning and helping her students with all their educational problems. She is truly “one of a kind.”