

The Hidden Truth: An Institutional Look at the Underreporting of Rape

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I. Research Question

Every six seconds a woman somewhere in the United States is raped (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999). This issue is one of the many concerning women's rights in the United States. There are many female activist groups in the country, and they offer many services that are aimed at the bettering women's lives. Looking at the number of reported rapes for cities showed that there were vast differences between cities, even with cities that were close together in population. The cities of Miami, Phoenix, and Seattle all have approximately three million citizens, but Miami reported 113 rapes, Phoenix reported 422, and Seattle reported 181. This is a large discrepancy over a small population variable. So how do we explain the variation in the number of rape reports per capita for a metropolitan area?

A metropolitan area is defined as all areas included in a city area according to the metropolitan area data on the United States Census. The official rape report is the number of rapes a metropolitan area reports to the Uniform Crime Reports for the year of 1999. Per capita is defined by the number of people living in a given metropolitan area and will be determined by the Census.

The research for this project will concentrate on metropolitan areas with more than one million residents. This is done to ensure there is not a statistical error for smaller cities where one rape case would be a substantial portion of their population.

Discovering the explanation for the variation between reported rapes in municipalities is important to different groups of people. The first group is women in general. Underreporting of rape causes adverse affects for women, including continued victimization of women, and fixing the problem of under distributing resources because rape is not seen as a problem. The second group is advocacy groups such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Discovering this information makes them more informed when they advocate for women's rights. A final group that could benefit

from this would be police departments. Using this information they will be able to determine whether or not a special unit will be necessary to serve the community.

I will argue that the variation between the numbers of reported rapes in a metropolitan area can be determined by whether or not there is a special domestic violence or rape unit in the city.

II. Literature Review

Underreporting is the term used to describe the condition where there are more occurrences of a crime than there are reported to the police. There is a lot of research done on why people rape and where rape is more likely to occur, but there is little done on the underreporting of rape. The underreporting of rape is taken for granted by most researchers and is only mentioned briefly in most books before moving on to the main focus of the book. There are two types of explanations offered for the underreporting of rape, cultural theory and institutional theory.

The Cultural theory states that social factors such as religion, biological instincts, and social mores and norms cause the underreporting of rape. One cultural hypothesis is the religious aspect. Religious Culturalists believe religion's history have culturally allowed rape to remain a problem (Timmerman 203). They do not believe religion actively encourages rape, but through their inaction in such matters encourages the continuation of the problem. Religions have the platform to be able to influence the thinking of the common people, and their inaction on this issue gives the idea that there is no problem.

Another cultural hypothesis is the biological aspect. Biological Culturalists argue for the biological aspect believe that men rape out of a sense of a biological 'survival of the fittest' instinct. They believe that since rape is essentially a biological function, many people do not report it because they feel it is natural for it to happen. This creates a social norm where women are victimized and are unable to report when they are raped (Thornhill and Palmer 5). This socialization of women includes that they are at fault when raped. The victim of nonviolent rape is considered to have contributed to the rape by some means of consent because she did not fight back. These theorists show data involving rape cases where the woman did not actively fight back get less conviction rates. This causes women to be less likely to report when they are raped (Pugh 234).

Another cultural hypothesis states that mores and norms are the cause for the underreporting of rape. Mores Culturalists believe the biological aspects of the theory are wrong. They refute the argument by stating that it is gender, not sex that determines the behavior of the rape victim. Sex is the biological designation of a person and gender is the socially defined roles a person plays in society. The social mores and norms people believe that socially defined gender roles play a part in how a victim reacts in a rape case (Howard 273, Baron and Murray 7). These theorists believe the socialization of men to be aggressive and women to be docile, among other gender-based inequalities are responsible for the underreporting of rape.

The institutional theory focuses on the structural and institutional formation of society for the causes of underreporting of rape. Institutionalists argue the formation and operation of such things as state laws, trial courts, and the police procedures affect the underreporting of rape (Black 733; Holmstrom and BurGress 30). Many state laws are enacted as symbolic gestures and are not formally enforced by the trial courts. These types of laws seriously affect the legitimacy of the court system and decrease the victims' likelihood for taking the rape to the legal system. Many times the filing of a report of rape is humiliating to the victim. This includes questioning that is incredibly personal, as well as the necessity to preserve evidence in this type of case can be very demeaning. Combined with the low prosecution rate of many states and many women are deterred from filing a report. Therefore they argues that disillusionment with the justice system leads to the underreporting of rape.

The theory that will be used in this paper is the institutional theory. The cultural theory will not be used because many of the variables within the cultural theory are not easily discerned from each other. Religious Cultural variables would be difficult to ascertain. Once you find out what percentage of a metropolitan area is a particular religion, you would then have to run tests to determine whether a particular religion is actually responsible. This type of data gathering is very cumbersome. They are also very difficult to turn into variables. The final reason for not using this theory is because there are very few opportunities to fix a problem that is based in culture. Most cultural tests on cultural theories are explanatory in nature, but offer no real solution on how to change the cultural aspects of the situation. The institutional theory will be explored because it will

most likely be understood. The evidence reported for institutional structures is easily understood because there is plenty of data. The data is also recorded from official government sources, which adds to the legitimacy of the data.

Hypothesis and Theory

The institutional theory is based on a few key assumptions. First, institutions affect the actions of a culture. Institutions create a cycle of victimization, and changing institutions will change the societal behavior. The first assumption is that institutions can affect the way a person acts in society. (Black 733) This is the most basic assumption and all the others derive from it.

Second, institutions create a cycle of victimization. This victimization is the true cause of underreporting. Women who have been raped feel they are the victims when they report to the police. The procedures to file a rape report are humiliating added to an already traumatic experience (Holmstrom and BurGress 30). If there were some type of special unit involved in the taking of rape reports, such as a specialized unit then in areas that have such units there will be more reporting of rape.

The third assumption is that changing institutions will change behavior of people. This is a very simple assumption. Since institutions affect the way people act, then changing the institutions changes the way people act. Without this assumption then it would not be worth looking at the theory since it would not matter if there could be no solution.

The institution that will be examined in this report is whether or not a city has a specialized rape or domestic violence unit. A specialized rape or domestic violence unit is defined as a specialized unit within a police department structure that handles rape cases instead of normal street police officers.

The hypothesis is that municipalities with domestic violence or rape units will have a higher rate of reporting per capita than cities without them. The use of special domestic violence or rape units will increase the number of rapes reported because the special training will help the officer to give women the support they need during a very

tragic time. Leading to a decreased feeling of victimization and a higher likelihood of increasing reporting.

The actions of institutions in municipal areas are being tested with this theory. The hypothesis proposes there is a positive correlation between the presence of a special domestic violence or rape unit. The assumption is the presence or lack of this unit will cause increased reporting of rape, thus it is an institutional theory.

There are some factors that could lead to a weakening of the hypothesis. There is a strong correlation between weather and rape reports. There is a positive correlation between temperature increases and rape reports. There are many more rapes committed in the summer than in the winter. Tests will be run to show this is not a problem with my hypothesis.

Data and Method

The data that will be used to test these hypotheses will be gathered from official sources for the year 1999. The dependent variable is the number of official reported rapes in a city per capita. The independent variable for the hypothesis will be a nominal yes/no variable of whether the police department has a special rape unit.

The official reported rapes is defined as the number of rapes that are listed in the federal Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) that are compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). This information will be gathered by looking at the FBI's website and looking at the official UCR. A special rape unit will be defined as any police unit that has received special training in the special situation of rape or domestic violence. This information will be gathered using websites and calling police stations to see if they have such units. The dependent variable will be named Underreporting. It will range from 0 to 1. The independent variable will be named Special Unit and will be a nominal yes/no variable. The independent variable for the control of weather will be named Regional Code and will be a nominal regional code with the categories Northeast, South, Midwest, Southwest, and Pacific.

After compiling the data the first test to be run will be a T-test on the dependent variable to show a correlation between specialized domestic or rape units to the number of reported rapes.. A T-test is run when the dependent variable is ratio and the independent variable is nominal. The results of the T-test for this variable is expected to show a significance of lower than .05. Following the T-test a bivariate correlation test will be run to determine the strength of the correlation.

The second test will be an analysis of variance on the weather control independent variable. The dependent variable is a ratio variable and the independent variable is a nominal variable with more than two designations. The results for this test is expected to come with a significance of greater than .05 and will show there are no correlation between weather and official crime reports.

The third test will be a cross tab test to determine whether or not the region a city is determines if they have a specialized unit. The region a municipality is in is a proxy for their weather patterns since municipalities in the same region would experience similar weather patterns.

Results

The running of a T-test allows us to see whether there is a correlation between the use of a special domestic or rape unit and the number of reported rapes in a municipality.

Group Statistics					
Specialized Rape Unit		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Cap x 10 to the 5th	Yes	15	23.87654	15.94455907	4.116867
	No	31	9.808284	6.76669263	1.215334

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error of Difference
PerCap							
Equal Variances Assumed	15.048	.000	4.224	44	.000	14.06825353	3.33023613

Correlations			
		Cap x 10 to the 5th	Rapes per Capita
Cap x 10 to the 5th	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.457**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
	N	46	46
Rapes per Capita	Pearson Correlation	.457**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.
	N	46	46

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of this T-test show there is correlation between the dependent and independent variable. The N of municipalities with a special unit was 15 and their mean was 23.87654, while those municipalities without a special unit, N 31, had a mean of just 9.808284. This difference in means is significant as shown by the Significance of .000. There is a 0% chance of getting a mean difference of this size if there was no relationship between the two variables.

The strength of the correlation is relatively high. The Pearson Correlation shows a .457 correlation with a significance of .001. This shows there is a strong positive relationship between the two variables.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
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Northeast	8	8.94739875	4.93455340
South	11	20.85800000	18.34054383
Midwest	12	11.68584008	8.46972960
Southwest	9	18.42524111	13.15189499
Pacific	6	9.18840333	5.15053616
Total	46	14.39575785	12.41282448

ANOVA

Cap x 10 to the 5th

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1093.797	4	273.449	1.920	.125
Within Groups	5839.723	41	142.432		
Total	6933.520	45			

There is no significance between the dependent variable and the weather. The analysis of variance shows a significance of .125 and is not low enough to reject the null hypothesis. This means there is a 12.5% chance of getting a difference of means of this magnitude if there were no correlation between them at all.

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Specialized Rape Unit * Regional Code	48	100.0%	0	.0%	48	100.0%

Specialized Rape Unit * Regional Code Crosstabulation

Count		Regional Code					Total
		Northeast	South	Midwest	Southwest	Pacific	
Specialized Rape Unit	Yes	3	4	2	6	1	16
	No	5	7	10	4	5	31
Total		8	11	13	10	6	48

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.230 ^a	8	.411
Likelihood Ratio	8.268	8	.408
N of Valid Cases	48		

a. 11 cells (73.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .13.

The cross tabulation test shows that there is no significance between a municipalities' regional code and whether or not there is a special unit. The significance value for the test is .411, which means there is a 41% chance of getting a Chi-square of that size if there is no relationship, which is much higher than the 5% chance needed to reject the null hypothesis.

Conclusions

The data shows there is a large positive correlation between having as domestic violence or specialized rape unit and the number of reported rapes in a given municipality. This information is needed in order to decrease the victimization of women. The YWCA and other women's advocacy groups can use this data in pushing for new domestic violence and special rape training for officers in their cities. This information can also be used by police stations since it is their responsibility for the safety of the public. This report will show them the effectiveness of the specialized rape units and will hopefully give them the idea to make the institution a more prevalent one.

The result of this paper strengthens the institutional theory. This report shows there is explanatory power using institutions to determine how people will act in a given situation. This supports the basic assumptions of the theory.

While doing my research a few other institutional questions came to my attention. First there is the matter of prosecution rates. It seems there should be a positive correlation for the number of rapes reported in the city as the percentage of prosecutions of rape increases. There are many difficulties in undertaking such a study. Much of the data on that topic will need to be changed since the recording of data for different institutions is different. For example prosecutions for rape is handled in federal district courts not at the municipality. Another question to be looked at in the future is whether or not higher reported rapes is a function of a city being more violent. The future of women's rights and their protection can be helped by the continuation of this research.

Works Cited

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