

Brief Report: A County-Wide Survey of Residents' Violence Exposure

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Objectives

Violence continues to be a major public health problem in the United States [1,2] particularly in high-poverty environments [3]. Rates of violence exposure are especially elevated among youth and minorities living in these environments [4,5] with the sequelae of such exposure including increased risk of adverse health effects [3,6,7] depression [8,9] suicide [10,11] violent behavior [12,13] and premature mortality [14].

We examined levels of self-reported violence exposure within a large county in Ohio. The location of two high-poverty cities within this county provided a unique opportunity to compare reports of residents living within these cities to information reported from other county residents. Thus, we were able to examine the magnitude of possible violence exposure disparities of individuals living in high poverty neighborhoods with individuals living in other neighborhoods within the same geographic county.

Methods

The United States Attorney General's Defending Childhood Demonstration Program is designed to develop and support comprehensive community-based strategic planning and implementation of projects to prevent and reduce the impact of children's exposure to violence in their homes, schools, and communities. As a prelude to service provision at one of the sites selected for implementation (Cuyahoga County, Ohio), a county-wide, random digit dial telephone survey using a stratified random sample design by zip code was conducted in November and December 2011 to provide data on violence exposure in a sample of adult residents (ages 18 and above). The study was conducted by trained telephone interviewers using a scripted protocol approved by the Center for Court Innovation's Institutional Review Board. The interviews were confidential and no names or addresses were collected. Participants were free to decline the interview and there was no remuneration for participation. Data collected by phone survey related to violence exposure has been a common method that has yielded reliable results [2]. To ensure an adequate representation of individuals living in urban settings, telephone exchanges designated as "urban" by the U.S. Census Bureau were over-sampled. A total sample of 1201 telephone interviews were completed, 1036 (86%) land line and 165 (14%) cell phone. Interviews took approximately 15 minutes. Questions focused

on two major domains: self-reports of violence exposure in the past year (witness or victim) and, if the respondent had children, reports of their children's exposure to violence within the past year. Sample weights were generated post data collection to correct for disproportionate sampling procedures when generated for the entire county's population. These weights are reflected in our analyses. Cuyahoga County contains two of the poorest cities in the nation: Cleveland and East Cleveland. The focus of our analyses was the comparison of residents living in Cleveland/ East Cleveland with residents living outside these cities. Cleveland's (population: 396,815) ranks second among major cities in the U.S., with 31.2% of residents below the poverty level [15]. East Cleveland (population: 17,843) is the 3rd poorest mid-size city in Ohio, with 37.4% of residents living below the poverty line [15,16]. The overall poverty level for Cuyahoga County is 16.4%.

Results

Sample characteristics: mean age=48.6 years (range 18-95 yrs.), 54% female, 49% of respondents were married. 61% were Caucasian, 31% African American, and 8% other. Approximately 35% of respondents had completed a Bachelor's degree or higher. 29% were parents/caregivers of children living at home. When the sample was divided into residents living in the high poverty cities of Cleveland and East Cleveland, HP, (N=469) and other residents in the county, O, (N=708), significant demographic differences emerged with HP residents being more likely to: be African-American, be unmarried, have lower levels of employment, have lower income, and have less education (Table 1).

Logistic regression odds ratios estimated the magnitude of differences between residents' living in HP cities and O residents' key violence-related variables (Table 2). Compared to O residents, the odds of HP residents reporting crime as a big problem were 2.7 times higher, reporting gangs as a big problem 1.9 times higher, and reporting feeling unsafe in their neighborhood 3.5 times higher. Within the timeframe of the past year, compared to O residents, HP residents the odds of reporting being exposed to violence as a witness/victim were 3.5 times higher, reporting being beaten or mugged 4.0 times higher, reporting having seen others beaten or mugged 4.2 times higher, reporting their child observed a violent attack 3.4 times higher, and reporting their child knew someone who had been murdered in the last year 6.7 higher.

Variable	Total (N=1177)		Cleveland/ East Cleveland (n=469)		Outside High Poverty City (n=708)	
	%	N	%	n	%	n
Race/Ethnicity ^a						
White	60.5	712	36.4	171	76.6	542
African American	30.6	360	51.8	243	16.6	117
Other	7.6	90	10.3	48	5.9	42
Refused/Don't Know	1.2	14	1.5	7	1.0	7
Marital Status ^b						
Married	49.3	580	30.6	144	61.6	436
Divorced/Widowed	15.8	186	17.3	81	14.9	105
Never married	23.6	277	33.7	158	16.9	119
Other	10.7	126	17.9	84	6.0	42
Refused	0.6	7	0.5	3	0.7	5
Employment ^c						
Employed Full-time	41.9	493	32.3	151	48.3	342
Employed Part-time	12.0	142	13.3	62	11.2	79
Unemployed	7.4	88	12.7	59	4.0	28
Retired	19.4	229	15.6	73	22.0	155
Other	18.4	217	25.3	118	13.9	98
Refused	0.8	9	1.0	5	0.6	5
Income ^d						
<\$10,000 - \$20,000	21.0	247	34.9	164	11.7	83
\$20,001 - \$40,000	21.2	249	24.4	114	19.0	135
\$40,001 - \$60,000	11.6	136	10.7	50	12.1	86
\$60,001 - \$80,000	8.8	104	7.1	33	9.9	70
\$80,001 - >\$100,001	18.2	215	9.1	43	24.3	172
Refused/Don't Know	19.2	226	13.8	65	22.8	162
Education ^e						
<High School	7.6	90	12.9	61	4.1	29
High School/GED	27.3	322	37.5	176	20.6	146
Some College / Associates Degree	29.4	346	29.8	140	29.1	206
Bachelor's / Graduate Degree	34.8	410	18.9	89	45.4	321
Refused	0.8	10	0.9	4	0.8	6

Table 1: Weighted Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Study Sample. a $\chi^2=196.738$, df=2, p=.000, b $\chi^2=127.506$, df=3, p=.000, c $\chi^2=72.455$, df=4, p=.000, d $\chi^2=109.782$, df=4, p=.000, e $\chi^2=115.053$, df=3, p=.000

Conclusions

While other studies have documented the effects of living in high-violence environments, this study illuminates differences in the magnitude of violence exposure among residents living within a single county. Summary data for the county obscured important differences

between individuals living in high poverty cities and other residents. Those living in high poverty cities were more likely to report higher violence exposure than those living elsewhere. The magnitude of differences was notable. Underlying these differences were disparities in race, education, household income, employment and marital status. The data emphasize the divergent experiences of residents living

within the same county as well as the discrepancies in their violence exposure, victimization, and potential associated health risks.

Dependent Variable	B	SE	OR	95% CI	Wald
Perceiving Crime as a Big Problem (n=1143)	0.988	0.129	2.686	[2.084, 3.461]	58.316*
Perceiving Gang Violence as a Big Problem (n=1056)	0.645	0.127	1.906	[1.485, 2.446]	25.660*
Feeling unsafe in your neighborhood (n=858)	1.244	0.171	3.470	[2.484, 4.848]	53.206*
Adult exposed to any violence in the past year (n=1173)	1.266	0.127	3.547	[2.767, 4.547]	99.843*
Beaten or mugged in the past year (n=1171)	1.374	0.358	3.950	[1.958, 7.968]	14.723*
Seen others beaten or mugged in the past year (n=1169)	1.434	0.155	4.195	[3.094, 5.687]	85.188*
Your child seen someone attacked in the past year (n=327) ^a	1.232	0.360	3.429	[1.693, 6.945]	11.705*
Anyone close to your child murdered in the past year (n=338) ^a	1.907	0.453	6.736	[2.773, 16.364]	17.737*

Table 2: Weighted Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis based on living outside a high poverty city (0) vs. living in Cleveland/East Cleveland (1), * p ≤ 0.001, Weights for the final two variables were adjusted based on the restricted population (parents only).

*The survey methodology was designed by social scientists at the Center for Court Innovation in conjunction with their ongoing evaluation of the U.S. Attorney General's Defending Childhood Demonstration Program (National Institute of Justice Grant #2010-IJ-CX-0015).

Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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