



ICPSR 32601

Police Decision Making in Sexual Assault Cases: An Analysis of Crime Reported to the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, 2008

Cassia Spohn
Arizona State University

Katharine Tellis
California State University-Los Angeles

User Guide



National Institute of Justice
Data Resources Program

ICPSR

P.O. Box 1248
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106
www.icpsr.umich.edu

Terms of Use

The terms of use for this study can be found at:
<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies/32601/terms>

Information about Copyrighted Content

Some instruments administered as part of this study may contain in whole or substantially in part contents from copyrighted instruments. Reproductions of the instruments are provided as documentation for the analysis of the data associated with this collection. Restrictions on "fair use" apply to all copyrighted content. More information about the reproduction of copyrighted works by educators and librarians is available from the United States Copyright Office.

NOTICE

WARNING CONCERNING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

Bibliographic Description

ICPSR Study No.: 32601

Title: Police Decision Making in Sexual Assault Cases: An Analysis of Crime Reported to the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, 2008

Principal Investigator(s): Cassia Spohn, Arizona State University

Katharine Tellis, California State University-Los Angeles

Funding Agency: United States Department of Justice. Office of Justice Programs. National Institute of Justice

Grant Number: 2009-WG-BX-009

Bibliographic Citation: Spohn, Cassia, and Katharine Tellis. Police Decision Making in Sexual Assault Cases: An Analysis of Crime Reported to the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, 2008. ICPSR32601-v2. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2013-11-08. doi:10.3886/ICPSR32601.v2

Scope of Study

Summary: This study used a mixed-methods approach to pursue five interrelated objectives: (1) to document the extent of case attrition and to identify the stages of the criminal justice process where attrition is most likely to occur; (2) to identify the case complexities and evidentiary factors that affect the likelihood of attrition in sexual assault cases; (3) to identify the predictors of case outcomes in sexual assault cases; (4) to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors that lead police to unfound the charges in sexual assault cases; and (5) to identify the situations in which sexual assault cases are being cleared by exceptional means. Toward this end, three primary data sources were used: (1) quantitative data on the outcomes of sexual assaults reported to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) from 2005 to 2009, (2) qualitative data from interviews with detectives and with deputy district attorneys with the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office who handled sexual assault cases during this time period, and (3) detailed quantitative and qualitative data from case files for a sample of cases reported to the two agencies in 2008.

The complete case files for sexual assaults that were reported to the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department in 2008 were obtained by members of the research team and very detailed information (quantitative and qualitative data) was extracted from the files on each case in Dataset 1 (Case Outcomes and Characteristics: Reports from 2008). The case file included the crime report prepared by the patrol officer who responded to the crime and took the initial report from the complainant, all follow-up reports prepared by the detective to whom the case was assigned for investigation, and the detective's reasons for unfounding the report or for clearing the case by arrest or by exceptional means. The case files also included either verbatim accounts or summaries of statements made by the complainant, by witnesses (if any), and by the suspect (if the suspect was interviewed); a description of physical evidence recovered from the alleged crime scene, and the results of the physical exam (Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) exam) of the victim (if the victim reported the crime within 72 hours of the alleged assault). Members of the research team read through each case file and recorded data in an SPSS data file. There are 650 cases and 261 variables in the data file. The variables in the data file include administrative police information and charges listed on the police report. There is also information related to the victim, the suspect, and the case.

Datasets 2-5 were obtained from the district attorney's office and contain outcome data that resulted in the arrest of a suspect. The outcome data obtained from the agency was for the following sex crimes: rape, attempted rape, sexual penetration with a foreign object, oral copulation, sodomy, unlawful sex, and sexual battery.

Dataset 3 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Police Department - Adult Arrests) is a subset of Dataset 2 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Police Department - All Cases) in that it only contains cases that resulted in the arrest of at least one adult suspect. Dataset 2 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Police Department - All Cases) contains 10,832 cases and 29 variables. Dataset 3 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Police Department - Adult Arrests) contains 891 cases and 45 variables.

Similarly, Dataset 5 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department - Adult Arrests) is a subset of Dataset 4 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department - All Cases) in that it only contains cases that resulted in the arrest of at least one adult suspect. Dataset 4 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department - All Cases) contains 3,309 cases and 33 variables. Dataset 5 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department - Adult Arrests) contains 904 cases and 47 variables.

Subject Term(s): crime reporting, criminal investigations, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, police, police reports, rape, sexual assault, violence, violence against women

Geographic Coverage: California, Los Angeles, United States

Time Period:

- 2008, Dataset 1
- 2005 - 2009, Datasets 2-5

Date(s) of Collection:

- January 2010 - May 2010

Unit of Observation: Criminal Cases

Universe: Dataset 1 (Case Outcomes and Characteristics: Reports from 2008): Reports of sexual assaults involving female victims over the age of 12 made to the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department in 2008.

Datasets 2-5: Reports of sexual assaults involving female victims over the age of 12 made to the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department from 2005 to 2009.

Data Type: administrative records data

Data Collection Notes: In addition to the available data files, researchers collected other qualitative data, but for confidentiality reasons, these data are not currently available. The source of data came from interviews with (1) Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) detectives who had experience investigating sexual assaults, (2) deputy district attorneys from the Victim Impact Program, and (3) sexual assault survivors. Researchers interviewed 52 detectives from the LAPD, 24 from the LASD, and 30 attorneys from the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office. Researchers also partnered with 3 LA agencies (the Domestic Abuse Center, the Valley Trauma Center, and the UCLA Rape Treatment Center) and interviewed 17 sexual assault survivors about their experiences with the criminal justice system. The two principal investigators conducted all of the interviews and recorded responses in a text file.

Users should be aware that it is not possible to merge the information collected from the LAPD with the information collected from the LASD because different types of information were collected and different definitions were used to describe the information.

Methodology

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study was (1) to document the extent of case attrition and to identify the stages of the criminal justice process where attrition is most likely to occur; (2) to identify the case complexities and evidentiary factors that affect the likelihood of attrition in sexual assault cases; (3) to identify the predictors of case outcomes in sexual assault cases; (4) to provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors that lead police to unfound the charges in sexual assault cases; and (5) to identify the situations in which sexual assault cases are being cleared by exceptional means.

Study Design: For the data in Dataset 1 (Case Outcomes and Characteristics: Reports from 2008) of this study, researchers obtained the complete case files for sexual assaults that were reported to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) in 2008. The LAPD and the LASD redacted all information that could be used to identify the victims, suspects, witnesses, or law enforcement officials assigned to investigate the case and then provided the researchers with a copy of the redacted file. Because researchers were provided with the complete case file for each of the 2008 cases, they were able to extract very detailed information (quantitative and qualitative data) on each case.

For Datasets 2-5, researchers obtained data on all sex crimes involving victims over the age of 12 that were reported from January of 2005 through December of 2009 from the LAPD and the LASD. For those cases that resulted in the arrest of an adult suspect, researchers obtained data on the outcome of the case from the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office. These longitudinal data were used to document the broad patterns of case attrition for sexual assaults reported during this time period.

Sample: For the data in Dataset 1 (Case Outcomes and Characteristics: Reports from 2008) of this study, researchers obtained the complete case files for sexual assaults that were reported to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) in 2008. From the LASD, researchers obtained case files for all reports that met selection criteria. Due to the large number of cases reported to the LAPD in 2008, researchers selected a stratified random sample of cases. Because researchers wanted to ensure an adequate number of cases from each of the LAPD's 19 divisions, as well as an adequate number of cases from each case clearance category (cleared by arrest, cleared by exceptional means, investigation continuing, and unfounded), the sample was stratified by LAPD division and, within each division, by the type of case clearance.

For Datasets 2-5, researchers obtained data on all sex crimes involving victims over the age of 12 that were reported from January of 2005 through December of 2009 from the LAPD and the LASD. For those cases that resulted in the arrest of an adult suspect, researchers obtained data on the outcome of the case from the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office.

Mode of Data Collection: record abstracts

Description of Variables: The variables in Dataset 1 (Case Outcomes and Characteristics: Reports from 2008) include administrative police information and charges listed on the police report. There is also information related to the victim including background characteristics such as age and race, credibility factors such as criminal record, drinking at time of incident, mental health issues, or inconsistent statements to police, and cooperation with law enforcement such as identifying the suspect by full name and address, cooperation during police investigation, or not wanting the suspect arrested. In addition, there are variables regarding the suspect such as age, race, criminal record, whether the suspect was arrested, and any charges filed. There are also variables related to the case including the types of charges, the time of day when the crime occurred, the relationship between the victim and the suspect, the presence of evidence and witnesses, and the characteristics of the police investigation.

Variables in Dataset 2 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Police Department - All Cases) include case status, description of the incident, information related to the crime including type, date, and time, and the victim's sex, race, and age.

Variables in Dataset 3 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Police Department - Adult Arrests) include case status, information related to the crime including type, date, and time, and the victim's sex, race, and age.

Variables in Dataset 4 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department - All Cases) include case status, arrest charges, and MO.

Variables in Dataset 5 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department - Adult Arrests) include case status and arrest charges.

Response Rates: Not applicable.

Presence of Common Scales: none

Extent of Processing: Created variable labels and/or value labels.
Standardized missing values.
Checked for undocumented or out-of-range codes.

Access and Availability

Note: A list of the data formats available for this study can be found in the [summary of holdings](#). Detailed file-level information (such as record length, case count, and variable count) is listed in the [file manifest](#).

Restrictions: The data are restricted from general dissemination. Users interested in obtaining these data must complete a Restricted Data Use Agreement form and specify the reasons for the request. A copy of the Restricted Data Use Agreement form can be requested by calling 800-999-0960. Researchers can also download this form as a Portable Document Format (PDF) file from the download page associated with this dataset. Completed forms should be returned to: Director, National Archive of Criminal Justice Data, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, Institute for Social Research, P.O. Box 1248, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248, or by fax: 734-647-8200.

Original ICPSR Release: 2012-04-11

Version History: The last update of this study occurred on 2013-11-08.

2013-11-08

The following data files have been added:

Dataset 2 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Police Department - All Cases)

Dataset 3 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Police Department - Adult Arrests)

Dataset 4 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department - All Cases)

Dataset 5 (Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department - Adult Arrests)

Dataset(s):

- DS1: Case Outcomes and Characteristics: Reports from 2008
- DS2: Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Police Department - All Cases

- DS3: Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Police Department - Adult Arrests
- DS4: Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department - All Cases
- DS5: Sexual Assault Case Attrition: 2005 to 2009, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department - Adult Arrests

Publications

Final Reports and Other Publication Resources:

A list of publications related to, or based on, this data collection can be accessed from the study's download page on the NACJD Web site or through the ICPSR Bibliography of Data-Related Literature at <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/ICPSR/citations/index.html>. The list of citations includes links to abstracts and publications in Portable Document Format (PDF) files or text files when available.

Final reports and other publications describing research conducted on a variety of criminal justice topics are available from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS). NCJRS was established in 1972 by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), an agency of the U.S. Department of Justice, to provide research findings to criminal justice professionals and researchers. NCJRS operates specialized clearinghouses that are staffed by information specialists who supply a range of reference, referral, and distribution services. Publications can be obtained from NCJRS at NIJ/NCJRS, Box 6000, Rockville, MD, 20849-6000, 800-851-3420 or 301-519-5500. TTY Service for the Hearing Impaired is 877-712-9279 (toll-free) or 301-947-8374 (local). The URL for the NCJRS Web site is:

<http://www.ncjrs.gov/>

NIJ Data Resources Program

About the DRP: The National Institute of Justice Data Resources Program (DRP) makes datasets from NIJ-funded research and evaluation projects available to the research community and sponsors research and training activities devoted to secondary data analysis. Datasets are archived by the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD) at the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan.

The NACJD maintains a World Wide Web site with instructions for transferring files and sending messages. Criminal justice data funded by the Department of Justice are available via the Internet at this site at no charge to the user. NACJD may be contacted at NACJD/ICPSR, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, MI, 48106-1248, 800-999-0960. The URL for the NACJD Web site is:

<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/>