

ICPSR 3026

**Evaluating a Lethality Scale for the
Seattle Police Department
Domestic Violence Unit, 1995-1997**

Description

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Bibliographic Description

ICPSR Study No.: 3026

Title: Evaluating a Lethality Scale for the Seattle Police Department Domestic Violence Unit, 1995-1997

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Scope of Study

Summary: The specific aim of this project was to evaluate the usefulness of the Seattle Police Department's (SPD) Lethality Scale in identifying misdemeanor cases that might be high risk for escalating violence and subsequent felony incidents. Data provide information on 11,972 unique couples with incidents occurring between January 1, 1995, and December 31, 1997, involving intimate couples in which the suspect was at least 18 years old and the victim was at least 16, with no age restriction for cases referred to the juvenile division. The researchers reformatted the Domestic Violence Unit's (DVU) database to reflect a three-year history of violence between unique couple members. Only intimate couples

were considered, meaning suspects and victims who were married, divorced, had a child in common, or were dating. The Lethality Scale was derived from the data in the DVU database. It was composed of six incident characteristic components (offense score, weapon score, location score, injury score, personal score, and incident/other score) with varying values that contributed to an overall score. The Total Lethality Score was the sum of the values from these six components. The lethality score referred to an individual only and did not reflect information about other people involved in the incident. To interpret the score, the DVU specified a period of time--for example, six months--and computed lethality score values for every person involved in an incident during this period. Information on individuals with a Total Lethality Score over a certain cut-off was printed and reviewed by a detective. Data are provided for up to 25 incidents per unique couple. Incident variables in the dataset provide information on number of persons involved in the incident, time and weekday of the incident, beat, precinct, census tract, and place where the incident occurred, type of primary and secondary offenses, if a warrant was served, charges brought, final disposition, weapon type used, arrests made, court order information, if evidence was collected, if statements or photos were taken by the DVU, and sergeant action. Dates were converted to time intervals and provide the number of days between the incident date and the date the file was sent to the prosecutor, the date charges were brought, and the date the case was officially closed. Time intervals were also calculated for days between each incident for that couple. Personal information on the two persons in a couple includes age, gender, injuries and treatment, relationship and cohabitation status of the individuals, pregnancy status of each individual, alcohol and drug use at the time of the incident, and role of the individual in the incident (victim, suspect, victim/suspect). Lethality scale scores are included as well as the number of incidents in which the unique couple was involved in 1995 and 1996, and 1989 median household income for the census tract.

Subject Term(s): crime prediction, criminal histories, domestic violence, felony offenses, misdemeanor offenses, program evaluation, risk assessment

Geographic Coverage: Seattle, United States, Washington

Time Period: • January 1, 1995 - December 31, 1997

Date(s) of Collection: • 1995 - 1997

Unit of Observation: Unique couples

Universe: All reported misdemeanor domestic violence incidents in Seattle from 1995-1997.

Data Type: administrative records data

Data Collection Notes: These data are from Subproject 3 of the grant. The evaluation concluded that the scale, with all the scoring and weighting, reflected recidivism only and could not be modified to be a better predictive tool.

Methodology

Purpose of the Study: The majority of domestic violence incidents involve misdemeanor cases, but Seattle Police Department (SPD) detectives were routinely assigned to follow only felony incidents. Since assigning detective follow-up for all misdemeanor cases was not practical, the SPD created the Lethality Scale to screen misdemeanor domestic violence incidents for assignment to detectives for follow-up. The specific aim of this project was to evaluate the usefulness of the Seattle Police Department's (SPD) Lethality Scale in identifying misdemeanor cases that might be high risk for escalating violence and subsequent felony incidents. However, it should be noted that the term "Lethality Scale" is a misnomer since the scale did not cover only lethal outcomes.

Study Design: Data provide information on 11,972 unique couples with incidents occurring between January 1, 1995, and December 31, 1997, involving intimate couples in which the suspect was at least 18 years old and the victim was at least 16, with no age restriction for cases referred to the juvenile division. The researchers reformatted the Domestic Violence Unit's (DVU) database to reflect a three-year history of violence between unique couple members. Only intimate couples were considered, meaning suspects and victims who were married, divorced, had a child in common, or were dating. An individual's role as suspect or victim could change from incident to incident, meaning in one incident the individual could be a victim and in the next incident, the individual could be a suspect. A "strange couple" designation was given for incidents without a clearly defined victim and a clearly defined suspect. The Lethality Scale was derived from the data in the DVU database. It was composed of six incident characteristic components (offense score, weapon score, location score, injury score, personal score, and incident/other score) with varying values that contributed to an overall score. The Total Lethality Score was the sum of the values from these six components. The lethality score referred to an individual only and did not reflect information about other people involved in the incident. To interpret the score, the DVU specified a period of time--for example, six months--and computed lethality score values for every person involved in an incident during this period. An individual's Total Six Month Lethality Score was the sum of the Total Lethality Scores for every individual involved in an incident over the period of six months. Information on individuals with a Total Six Month Lethality Score over a certain cut-off was printed and reviewed

by a detective. The researchers simulated the DVU's approach using two years of DVU data from the database to evaluate the predictive ability of the Lethality Scale.

Sources of Information: Seattle Police Department Domestic Violence Unit database

Description of Variables: Data are provided for up to 25 incidents per unique couple. Incident variables in the dataset provide information on number of persons involved in the incident, time and weekday of the incident, beat, precinct, census tract, and place where the incident occurred, type of primary and secondary offenses, if a warrant was served, charges brought, final disposition, weapon type used, arrests made, court order information, if evidence was collected, if statements or photos were taken by the DVU, and sergeant action. Dates were converted to time intervals and provide the number of days between the incident date and the date the file was sent to the prosecutor, the date charges were brought, and the date the case was officially closed. Time intervals were also calculated for days between each incident for that couple. Personal information on the two persons in a couple includes age, gender, injuries and treatment, relationship and cohabitation status of the individuals, pregnancy status of each individual, alcohol and drug use at the time of the incident, and role of the individual in the incident (victim, suspect, victim/suspect). Lethality scale scores are included as well as the number of incidents in which the unique couple was involved in 1995 and 1996, and 1989 median household income for the census tract.

Response Rates: Not applicable.

Presence of Common Scales: None.

Extent of Processing: 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](#).

Some instruments administered as part of this study may contain contents from copyrighted instruments. Reproductions of the instruments are provided solely as documentation for the analysis of the data associated with this collection. Please contact the data producers for information on permissions to use the instruments for other purposes.

Restrictions: Access to these data is restricted. Users interested in obtaining these data must complete a Restricted Data Use Agreement, specify the reasons for the request, and obtain IRB approval or notice of exemption for their research.

Original ICPSR Release: 2001-12-21

Version History: The last update of this study occurred on 2012-08-22.

2012-08-22 - A Restricted Data Use Agreement form was added to the documentation files that can be downloaded from the study home page.

Dataset(s):

- DS1: Evaluating a Lethality Scale for the Seattle Police Department Domestic Violence Unit, 1995-1997

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/>