



City of Berkeley
Department of Health and Human Services
PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INCIDENTS, BERKELEY, 2000-2006

PREPARED BY

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BACKGROUND

The Berkeley Police Department (BPD) investigates reports of domestic violence, which includes assault, battery, violation of a protective order, vandalism, verbal and physical threats, stalking, brandishing a weapon, and harassing telephone calls or email communications. For each incident, the BPD records the age, sex, race/ethnicity of both victim and suspect, the date of the incident, city block, relationship between the victim and suspect, use of alcohol or drugs, and whether a child may be present.

METHODS

Extracts from the BPD data files were provided to the Public Health Division. The file had no personal identifiers. Therefore, the unit of analysis was incidents, rather than unique persons (in which multiple incidents may have occurred to the same victim.) Using ArcGIS 9.2, the block of the incident was geocoded to the centerline of streets by assigning a street address in the middle of block address range (950 for the 900 block, 1250 for the 1200 block, etc.). 93% of the 3239 incidents (2000-2006) were successfully geocoded and spatially joined to obtain the 2000 Census tract where the incident occurred. Berkeley population denominators for annual rates of domestic violence incidents were constructed from a linear extrapolation of the annual rate of population change by age-, sex-, race/ethnicity groupings in Berkeley's 1990 and 2000 census. 95% confidence intervals of these rates were based on the Poisson distribution. Frequency distributions were carried out with STATA 10.

RESULTS

Between 2000 and 2006, an average of 473 incidents were reported annually. The rate of incidents (per 100,000 residents) significantly decreased from 2000 to 2006. Women were victims in 86% of incidents and suspects in 15%. In over half of incidents, victims were aged 25-44 years. Suspects tended to be older than victims. African Americans comprised over 60% of incidents as either victims or suspects, and had disproportionately larger representation compared to their overall Berkeley population (~13%). Incidents in which alcohol or drug use was noted occurred for 13% of victims and 27% of suspects. In approximately 27% of incidents the victim and suspect had a child in common. Domestic violence reports concentrated in census tracts of south and west Berkeley.

DISCUSSION

Domestic violence is widespread in the United States, victimizing nearly 25% of women and 14% of men over their lifetimes.^{1,2} Many factors have been associated with domestic violence including demographics (victim age between 20 and 24 years, female sex, African-American or Latino race/ethnicity, low income, renter rather than homeowner)³⁻⁵, partner alcohol- and substance-use,⁶ legislation and law enforcement, provision of legal services,⁷ a history of intimate partner violence in female victim's family of origin,³ and neighborhood social disorder.⁸

In Berkeley, reported domestic violence incidents have declined between 2000 and 2006. This trend mirrors those of Alameda County and the state of California,⁹ and is consistent with national trends.⁴ Domestic violence is a complex phenomenon and it is difficult to attribute the declining rate to a specific risk factor. One researcher,⁷ citing national studies, suggested that the provision of legal services, improvements in economic status in the late 1990s, and



population aging may have contributed to the national decline. In the late 1990s, California legislators enacted laws (e.g., SB 218) that increased penalties (mandatory arrest) for violating restraining orders or engaging in domestic violence with weapons.

In Berkeley, the Berkeley Police Department (BPD) has conducted educational outreach to shelters where individuals are exposed to techniques to avoid and defuse potential confrontations. This establishes preventive interventions having a role in diminishing rates of domestic violence. On the other hand, The Domestic Crimes Unit (BPD) reports lower rates may be related to laws requiring the mandatory arrest in restraining order violations. One possibility is that increasing awareness of these laws may make some victims hesitant to contact police out of concern for future retaliation by the violators. Fear of reprisal by the perpetrator was reported by 19% of female victims in a national household survey of domestic violence.⁴ Changing Berkeley demographics also may have played a role in declining rates. Using a linear extrapolation of the annual change in population between the 1990 and 2000 Census to estimate the Berkeley population, the number of residents in high-risk groups (e.g., 20-24 years, African American), declined by over one-third from 2000 to 2006 (Public Health Division, unpublished data). Many other factors may have played a role, but cannot be easily documented.

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Domestic Violence Incidents Reports to Police by Census Tract Berkeley, 2004-2006

Legend

Number of Incidents

