Intimate Partner Violence
Incidence and Characteristics:
Idaho NIBRS 1995 to 2001 Data

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Aggregate research on intimate partner violence (IPV) and its context presents special challenges. It was not until the development of the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) that it was possible to efficiently cull out the IPV incidents from other crimes in police reports. In this research, we use 7 years of NIBRS data from one rural mountain state to identify the situational descriptors that serve as the ingredients in the “chemistry of crime.” We found that there is a tendency for IPV incidents to occur late at night, on the weekends, and on certain distinctive holidays. Such information may confirm what many have known anecdotally and help policy makers to best direct scarce prevention-related resources.

Keywords: NIBRS; victimization; domestic violence; intimate partner violence

The amount of crime is at times little known and less understood. But this dark figure of crime has been somewhat illuminated with advanced data collection and analysis techniques, as represented by the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). NIBRS data are more complete in the documentation of the breadth of crime and the characteristics of its occurrence. In contrast, intimate partner violence (IPV) or domestic violence crime characteristics have often been obfuscated by crime reporting under...
the traditional Uniform Crime Reporting techniques, which has been too narrowly focused and has not made relational connections possible.

Yet, it is the characteristics of crime, such as when and where it tends to occur, not just a delineation of offender and victim descriptors, that policy makers, the police, and the public need to understand if they hope to engage in prevention. As Felson (1998) explains in his book *Crime & Everyday Life*, much crime occurs because we don’t understand how to manipulate the how, when, and where of it to make crime less routine and thus less common. This is especially true for crimes of domestic violence that are generally less understood because of the limitations of the UCRs, the recall required for victimization surveys, and because such crimes were, until the past two decades, largely dismissed by official criminal justice actors as a family affair or private matter.

In this article, we use 7 years of NIBRS data to explore the incidence and characteristics of IPV in one rural mountain state—Idaho. Although Idaho is not likely to be representative of larger and more urbanized states in terms of index crimes, there is little reason to believe that IPV characteristics in Idaho aren’t generalizable to all states. Times of the day, the week, the month, the year, and the location of such crimes is probably fairly typical across states.

**POLICE REPORTS, NIBRS, AND IPV**

The difficulties in assessing the amount and characteristics of IPV using police report data or the Uniform Crime Reports (UCRs) are legend. The faults inherent in this data include a dearth of information on offenders and victims, numbers of incidents, and types of crimes covered (Saltzman, Mercy, & Rhodes, 1992; Thompson, Saltzman, & Bibel, 1999).

Researchers have often lamented the reluctance or inability of victims to report and the police to arrest offenders (Feder, 1996; Felson, Messner, Hoskin, & Deane, 2002; Kane, 1999; McLeod, 1983). Victim willingness to report is tied to privacy and reprisal concerns, their own circumstances, and their desire to protect the offender (Felson et al., 2002). Victim cooperation with the police is often problematic and premised on the presence of other factors (e.g., videotaped testimony and/or the relationship with victim/witness personnel; Dawson & Dinovitzer, 2001).

The police disposition decisions in intimate partner situations are influenced by such variables as characteristics of, and the relationship between, the victim or offender, attitudes and situational variables like the offender
presence, style of policing, legal imperatives, organizational practices, extent of injury, and immediate risk to the victim (Bell, 1985; Berk & Loseke, 1980; Buzawa, Austin, & Buzawa, 1995; Connolly, Huzurbazar, & Routh-McGee, 2000; Feder, 1996, 1997; Finn & Stalans, 1995; Jolin & Moose, 1997; Kane, 1999; Klinger, 1995; Robinson & Chandek, 2000; Sherman, 1992; Worden & Pollitz, 1984). The value of arrest in IPV has been the subject of extensive study and debate in the academy (Berk, Klap, Campbell, & Western, 1992; Buzawa & Buzawa, 1993, 1996; Davis, 1998; Dunford, Huizinga, & Elliott, 1998; Hirschel, Hutchison, Dean, & Mills, 1992; Maxwell, Garner, & Fagan, 2001; Pate & Hamilton, 1992; Sherman & Berk, 1984; Sherman, Smith, Schmidt, & Rogan, 1992). Of course, the greater the likelihood of victim cooperation and police formal handling (i.e., arrest), the more complete are the official data. Although the NIBRS does not fully address all the deficits of police arrest data (e.g., victim reluctance), its incidence-based nature does tend to capture more of the context and extent of these crimes (Rantala, 2000; Thompson et al., 1999).

In fact, as a partial redress to the deficiencies of UCRs, researchers since the 1990s began to detail and tout the relative value of the NIBRS for understanding the extent and nature of criminality (Akiyama & Nolan, 1999; Chilton & Jarvis, 1999; Dunn & Zelenock, 1999; Faggiani & McLaughlin, 1999; Hoffman, 2000; Maxfield, 1999; Maxfield & Maltz, 1999; Rantala, 2000; Thompson et al., 1999). Thompson and her colleagues (1999) used NIBRS data from Massachusetts (1994 to 1996) to illustrate its potential explanatory power in IPV. Because of some problems with missing cases and the nonrepresentative nature of the data, they were hesitant to overclaim the value of it. They did, however, note that the application of NIBRS data to the study of IPV enhances understanding of that crime for three reasons: Unlike the UCRs, more than one crime is reported per incident, there is the ability to examine multiple crimes in tandem with offender/victim relationship, and the researcher can compare and link offender and victim data.

We would also add that NIBRS data provide a rich contextual understanding to less-studied crimes, such as those outside the index variety. As Maxfield (1999) notes in his discussion of the relative value of the NCVS, the UCRs, and the NIBRS, the latter data enable “researchers to construct measures that reflect the situational context of incidents, not simply their statutory categories” (p. 125). They allow the researcher to profile the time and place characteristics of IPV and thus enhance the understanding of correlates of such crimes for policy makers and practitioners.
The NIBRS was developed in the 1980s as a means of enriching the extent and content of police report data. It includes incident and arrest records for the eight index crimes, incident information on 38 other offenses, and arrest records for 49 other offenses (Rantala, 2000). The demographics of both the victim and the offender are recorded. All data are standardized and delivered to a state-level agency—in Idaho’s case, the Idaho State Police—who then forward it to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Before the FBI will accept these data from any given state, however, the state must go through a testing and certification phase that warrants the methodology and substance of the data reported.

In 1991, the State of Idaho was certified as one of the first NIBRSs. The state began collecting crime incident information from local and state law enforcement agencies and storing it into a dedicated data repository. The current data collection mechanism captures crime incidents from 105 local and state law enforcement agencies, from 61 police departments, 43 sheriff offices, and the Idaho State Police. These agencies provide quarterly crime incident updates to the NIBRS data repository.

The Idaho Incident-Based Reporting System captures detailed information on criminal incidents reported to police, including characteristics of the crime occurrence. This database provides information to produce rich analytical crime reports and trends. Readers are cautioned that, although 98% of total crime incidents reported to the police in Idaho are captured by the NIBRS, findings in this report might differ from the ample spectrum of crime in Idaho’s communities, as only a fraction of total crime is actually reported and documented. Stohr et al. (2001), in their annual series *Idaho Crime Victimization Survey*, report that more than 83% of incidents of domestic violence were unreported to police in 2000, and for the same year, more than 50% of incidents of violent crime, child abuse, and property crime went unreported. Therefore, these data do not, by any means, include the full range of intimate partner incidents but only those being recorded in police reports during the years 1995 through 2001.

The Chemistry for Crime

Felson (1998) discusses a “chemistry for crime” that occurs when the right set of circumstances is assembled. If there is a “likely offender,” “a suitable target,” and “the absence of a capable guardian against the offense,” the optimal circumstances may obtain for predatory or other types of crime
To prevent such crime, one would need to forecast when these optimal circumstances would be aligned and disrupt the pattern. Although Felson (1998) lauds the calming effect that marriage has on criminal inclinations of both men and women, it is well understood that marriage and intimate relationships can be more dangerous for women than men. Women are much more likely to be victimized by an intimate than are men (Rennison, 2001). The data we present here will be less about the offender, the target, and the capable guardian for IPV and more about the environmental context in which they operate.

Once we understand when and where such crimes occur, we will have a better comprehension of why. We will also be armed with a better sense of when an offender is more likely to commit the crime and when the target is more vulnerable and the guardian (other family members, friends, neighbors, etc.) is more capable of preventing or deterring the violence.

METHOD

Sample Derivation

Approximately 1,305,500 persons or 98% of the state population is covered by the NIBRS reporting agencies in Idaho. There is, however, a lack of valuable crime data unreported to the state repository from the rural county of Lemhi and all tribal law enforcement agencies in the state. The latter deficiency effectively reduces the validity of these findings when summaries or findings are referred or implied by race/ethnicity for Native Americans.

We combine 7 years of data, which resulted in 36,080 incident reports of domestic violence, affecting 39,931 victims. These victims were related or connected in some way to 47,598 offenders, who committed 40,977 offenses against those victims. From the total number of offenders, 29,882 were arrested. This analysis reflects the first in-depth evaluation of crime among intimates ever made from the NIBRS police reports repository in Idaho and it certainly adds to our understanding of the characteristics of such offending.

The terms domestic violence and intimate partner violence are generally used differently for legal purposes than for social services, clinical, technical, or scientific studies. In this article, domestic violence or intimate partner violence is considered as any recorded crime incident involving an intimate relationship, such as spouse, ex-spouse, common-law spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, and partners of the same gender, documented through the Incident-Based Reporting System in Idaho.
This definition reflects most of the victim-offender relationships as stipulated by Idaho Code (Cumulative Pocket Supplement, 2001, 36-6303) for which domestic violence is defined as “the physical injury, sexual abuse or forced imprisonment or threat thereof of a family or household member, or of a minor child by a person with whom the victim has had or is having a dating relationship.” Family or household member means “spouses, former spouses, persons related by blood or marriage, persons who reside or have resided together, and persons who have a child in common regardless of whether they have been married or have lived together at any time.” Dating relationship is defined as “social relationships of a romantic nature.”

The five victim-offender relationships used in this research reflect the closest possible approach to the Idaho Code definition of IPV. The data available from NIBRS document each of the incidents by relationship of victims to offenders for which a data set of 36,693 crime incidents resulted from extracting the predetermined five relationships that encompass the legal definition of IPV.

By virtue of his position, one of the researchers was able to obtain live electronic access to the NIBRS. The data stored in the state repository do not contain personal identifiers, except for the location and incident number that could be traceable to files kept by the reporting agencies. The location and incident numbers were used exclusively to link and download the information from the NIBRS database into the respective files and to recode the incident locations to the county level.

The downloaded information, however, may not match the exact data as it was submitted to the FBI. After reporting the NIBRS data to the FBI, the possibility exists that late reports might be submitted. Thus, although these data may not match the FBI’s in some small ways, if there is a difference it is assumed that the data presented here are more complete.

**Measures**

One record from NIBRS stores information for only one victim, although one crime incident can contain multiple victims and each of the victims is independently associated with one or multiple offenders. Each of the victims was linked to one or multiple offenders. Each of the victims was also related to a set of offenses committed by the respective offenders, and finally, a subset of all offenders is linked to an arrest file.

We produced an in-depth profile of IPV, based on historical data for the predetermined victim-offender relationships. First, we extracted demographic characteristics and all other related and available information from
the NIBRS repository to construct four data sets: victims, offenders, offenses, and arrests. Several other fixed variables resulted from the recodification and interrelation of the available information.

Based on these relationships, there were 36,693 crime incidents extracted for the period from 1995 to 2001 that affected 39,931 victims (33,502 were single victims and 3,191 were associated with multiple victims). There were 40,977 offenses committed against those victims by 47,598 offenders, which in turn resulted in 29,882 arrests.

To produce a detailed report on domestic violence, including every available variable, the information was processed by using Crystal Reports, Microsoft Access, and SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Each of the variables was defined, described, and summarized, and trends in these data were analyzed. Table 1 includes the data elements extracted from the Idaho NIBRS data.

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSES

#### Domestic Violence Generalities

General characteristics of incidents of domestic violence from 1995 to 2001, based on intimate relationships from the Idaho Incident-Based Re-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Offense</th>
<th>Offender</th>
<th>Arrest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of offense</td>
<td>Type of offense</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Type of weapon</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Incident number</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Use alcohol/drugs</td>
<td>Date of arrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumstances</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Incident number</td>
<td>Type of arrest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injuries</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Arresting offense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation to offender</td>
<td>(Up to 10 offenses per victim)</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Disposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incident number</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>(Up to 10 offenders per victim)</td>
<td>Incident number</td>
<td>Incident number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Up to 10 victim-offender relationship indicators)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
porting System, provided a clear sense of a domestic violence incident profile. There were 36,688 documented incidents of domestic violence from 1995 to 2001. Each of those incidents was related to one or more victims and each of the victims was related to one or more offenders. The offenders were related to one or multiple offenses committed against each of the victims, and from the offenders group, approximately 80% were arrested. Each incident included an average of 1.12 offenses. The total victim-offender counts are represented in Figure 1.

In Table 2, the annual incidence of domestic violence for the period between 1995 and 2000 and the estimated annual Idaho population are compared (see the Census Bureau Web site: http://eire.census.gov/popest/archives/state/). In 2001, there were 4.47 incidents of domestic violence per every 1,000 persons, representing a statistically significant ($p < .001$) rate decrease of 11.6% from the 5.06 rate reported in 1995. This pattern of an overall decreasing incidence of IPV fits the national crime victimization data of decreasing property and violent crime in the latter part of the 1990s (Rennison, 2001). Similarly, the Idaho Crime Victimization (ICVS) data also indicate that intimate partner victimization has decreased in Idaho in a gross sense but that this path downward is riddled, much like these NIBRS data, with some slight increases, followed by decreases (Stohr et al., 2001).

It is not surprising, given the general seasonal crime trends, that the monthly incidence of reported IPV is more evident and more prevalent during the summer months. Our data indicate that July is the month with the highest number of reported IPV incidents. Reported incidents slightly
decline during the fall and winter months (see Figure 2). Of course, the summer months have long been identified as correlates with increased crime; these data merely confirm this characteristic for IPV. The closer proximity of the offender and the target during the summer months, as family members and intimates take vacation time, may also set the stage for greater violence or create that chemistry for crime that Felson (1998) mentioned.

We also found that the first day of each month and the weekends consistently included more incidents of IPV than any other day of the month or days of the week. Again, we expect that the increase in weekend crimes of this type is tied to both proximity and opportunity characteristics of IPV. Perpetrators and victims of this crime are more likely to see each other on the weekends and the offender is more likely to have an opportunity to abuse the victim.

Table 2: Annual Incidence of Intimate Partner Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># Incidents</th>
<th># Respondents</th>
<th>Rate (x 1,000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>5,896</td>
<td>1,165,000</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>5,206</td>
<td>1,187,706</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>5,856</td>
<td>1,210,638</td>
<td>4.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>5,840</td>
<td>1,230,923</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>5,468</td>
<td>1,251,700</td>
<td>4.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5,754</td>
<td>1,299,258</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>5,911</td>
<td>1,321,006</td>
<td>4.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Quarterly Incidence of Domestic Violence
Our data indicate that approximately 15.6 domestic victimizations are reported every day in the state. About 64% of these reports occurred on weekdays; the remainder was spread out through Saturday and Sunday. Historically, most incidents of IPV happened on Sundays, decreasing during Monday and Tuesday. The lowest incidence of domestic violence is reported on Wednesdays.

The data also suggest that IPV tends to occur throughout the day, but incidents are most pronounced during the evening hours (see Figure 3). The lowest incidence is reported early in the day between 6:00 to 7:00 in the morning. By noon, there is a peak in the number of incidents, which tend to decrease in the following 3 hours and later increase at higher rates throughout the evening hours. This cycle repeats every 24 hours, with virtually no difference in trend behavior between weekdays or weekends. However, we did find that on Friday and Saturday nights there were more incidents in the early hours, right after midnight from the prior day, in comparison with each of the other days. Again, we expect that more abuse occurs when both the offender and the victim are in close proximity and the opportunity for abuse presents itself.

The peaks at night for this type of crime could also be tied to greater alcohol consumption, increased irritability as the day wears on, and the assumption that the children are more likely to be in bed and therefore will not be witnesses to the abuse. Research by Brecklin (2002), using 4 years of NCVS data, found a linkage between perpetrator alcohol consumption and the increased likelihood of physical injury. Of course, the police are more likely to be called to the scene of an IPV incident, and to make a report, if
there is greater physical injury to the victim. Felson (1998) also mentions the close linkage between alcohol consumption and crimes of violence. If one wishes to reduce violent crime, managing alcohol consumption is one approach to take.

These data also indicate that there is, in fact, a strong relationship between particular holidays and the incidence of reports of IPV (see Figure 4). The approximate average of domestic violence incidents is represented by the red line in Figure 4. On average, Valentine’s Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas are dates with a total number of incidents slightly below the general trend of any ordinary nonholiday. But New Year’s Eve, New Year’s Day, the day of the Super Bowl, Memorial Day, and Independence Day are dates with total domestic violence reports higher than the normal daily average. In particular, on average, New Year’s Day has 2.7 times more incidents of domestic violence, followed by Independence Day and the day of the Super Bowl, respectively.

Our expectation is that the familial and relational sentiments as represented by Valentine’s Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas are likely to mitigate the impulse to abuse that is evidently present on these other holidays. As Felson (1998) notes, guilt is one means of controlling the criminal inclinations of likely offenders. During two of these holidays, there is also more

Figure 4: Incidence by Holiday
family around, which would provide more capable guardians and reduce
the opportunity to abuse without witnesses.

We think it is possible that the holidays where the most abuse occurs are
those where alcohol is more likely to be consumed, thus heightening abuse
inclinations. It is also possible that on holidays such as New Year’s Day and
the Super Bowl, greater levels of testosterone are experienced among those
who watch football on television. Again, Felson (1998) remarked on the
different levels of violence at sporting events in the United States versus
European countries and thought the essential difference, or the reason for
less violence here in stadiums, is the restrictions Americans tend to put on
alcohol consumption in stadiums (bringing in bottles, sales of soft versus
hard liquor, etc.). But, of course, no such restrictions on alcohol consump-
tion apply to the home environment.

Some interesting research has documented the increases in testosterone
that occur among both men and women when football, or other violent
sports, are watched (Walsh, 2002). In turn, heightened testosterone levels
have been linked to violence (Mazur & Booth, 1998). We think it possible
that such factors as proximity, opportunity, alcohol consumption, and pos-
sibly heightened testosterone levels all coalesce on some holidays, creating
a natural incubator, or the right chemistry, for more IPV.

Of course, opportunity, without capable guardians or the eyes of con-
cerned others, presents itself more at home than in any other environment.
IPV incidents, involving the five basic relationships—spouse to spouse, ex-
spouse to ex-spouse, common-law spouses, boyfriend/girlfriend, gay, and
lesbian relationships—occurred within the confines of victim’s residence
or home in 86.6% of the cases (the data only summarized here). In about
5.4% of the cases, the incident occurred on roadways, such as highways,
local roads, or alleys. Fewer incidents occurred outside of these two main
categories. But the vast majority of these offenses occurred in places where
there would be a greater expectation of seclusion, although some took place
in public spaces such as bars or nightclubs, restaurants, or schools.

CONCLUSION

We found that the characteristics of IPV, the whens and wheres of it, mir-
ror those of other index offenses. A greater percentage of all crime occurs at
night, on the weekends, during the summer, and in one’s home than at other
times and places. As IPV was less understood than other types of crime,
these facts were less known than they perhaps should be.
We also found that IPV occurred at times when one would expect greater contact between the motivated offender and the target (e.g., at night and on the weekends). It also occurred at times of the night when capable guardians, such as children, were least likely to view it and in places (e.g., the home) where there was greater seclusion from other guardians who might intercede on the victim’s behalf (e.g., extended family, friends, neighbors, strangers). Finally, as one might expect based on Felson’s (1998) theory, IPV was also more likely on holidays when use of alcohol likely increases and the sentiments attached to that day (such as Super Bowl Sunday) do not present as much of an inhibition to the use of violence against intimates.

We think that IPV occurs in a cultural and environmental context that was only touched on in this research. Undoubtedly, attitudes toward women and other intimates that make them a suitable target are tied to the larger values and perceptions of a community. We also think, however, that our data clearly indicate that targets of IPV are more vulnerable to this type of crime at particular times and places. Unfortunately, those times and places are when one most has an expectation of safety (e.g., at night and in one’s own home). For this reason, any real policy-related remedy for IPV must be geared toward attitudes and practices that make women and other targets suitable in the minds of likely offenders.

However, more research is clearly needed on the contextual parameters of IPV. Why is there more of this violence during some parts of the day, week, and year? Why do some holidays appear to have a calming effect and others present a virtual call to violence? Is it the presence of alcohol and/or something as elemental as the excitation of a hormone that leads to greater levels of violence? Our explanations here for these time and place phenomena are fairly speculative but merit further investigation if we are to prevent IPV.

REFERENCES


Salvador P. Vazquez is the director of the Statistical Analysis Center for the Idaho State Police and is currently a master’s degree student in the Department of Criminal Justice at Boise State University. He has done research on victimization, NIBRS data, and drug courts and has made a number of presentations at the Bureau of Justice Statistics Conference on these subjects. He has begun research on homicide characteristics as substantively enhanced with NIBRS data.
Mary K. Stohr is a professor in the Department of Criminal Justice Administration at Boise State University. Her research and publications range across a spectrum of criminal justice topics. She currently is focused on several topics related to victimization as they are illuminated by state-level victimization surveys.

Marcus Purkiss completed his master’s degree at Boise State University in spring 2003. His research interests center on statute analysis and international security issues.