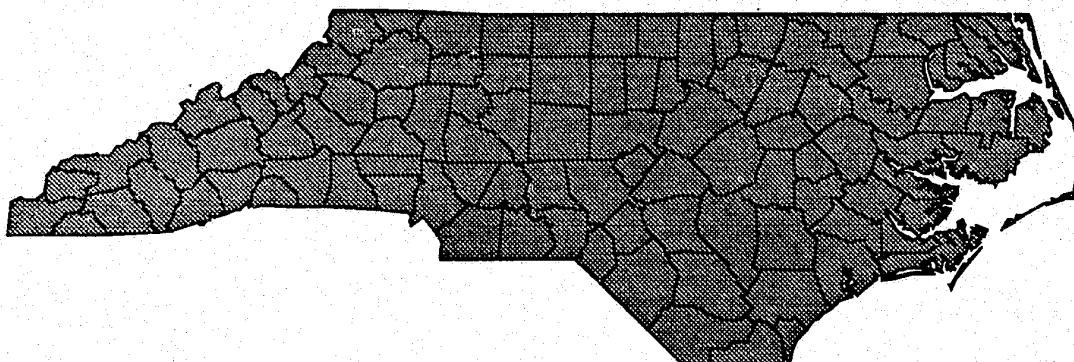


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE NORTH CAROLINA VIOLENT CRIME ASSESSMENT PROJECT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE NORTH CAROLINA VIOLENT CRIME ASSESSMENT PROJECT

In January, 1992, the North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety and the Governor's Crime Commission began a project designed to assess, accurately and comprehensively, the nature and extent of violent crime which occurred within the state during 1991. Recognizing that official data in the form of "crimes reported to police" is an incomplete picture due to the non-reporting by some victims, the project was to assess the levels of victimization of crime, especially violent crime. Another aspect of the project was to measure fear of crime. Often as debilitating as the crimes themselves, fear of crime affects the quality of life of many citizens. The recognition that violent crime does not exist in a vacuum demands the need to examine social and economic factors and test their relationships to violent crime. Finally, one aspect of the project was to collect the attitudes and opinions of the citizens of the state regarding violent crime in the past and future and the causes of the violent crime problem. This ambitious project was initiated in order to better understand the phenomenon of violent crime in North Carolina.

To accomplish the goals, the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety identified an Assessment Team consisting of:

William V. Pelfrey, Ph.D., Team Coordinator
Western Carolina University

Robert M. Bohm, Ph.D.
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Charles W. Dean, Ph.D.
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

John A. Humphrey, Ph.D.
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Laura J. Moriarty, Ph.D.
Western Carolina University

Michael L. Vasu, Ph.D.
North Carolina State University

Gary W. Willis, J.D.
Pembroke State University

Margaret A. Zahn, Ph.D.
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

This Assessment Team represents some of the best researchers of crime-related issues in the United States.

The Assessment Team developed strategies, instruments and methodologies to accurately and comprehensively measure and analyze violent crime. Three methodologies were defined: A telephone survey with a large sample, a mailed survey asking questions related to fear, attitudes and opinions and, finally, a collection of social and economic data which could help explain violent crime. These methodologies were designed to insure that the results would be reliable and valid as estimates of victimization in the state and measures of the attitudes and opinions of the citizens. Even though the project was ambitious, extensive and involved more citizen contacts than any other victimization survey, the time allocated for its completion was relatively short. Only because of the experience, talent and professionalism of the Assessment Team could such a project give policy makers and criminal justice officials the very best information available through any source on the nature and extent of violent crime.

RESULTS

The telephone survey was managed by Dr. Vasu and involved 9774 interviews of citizens throughout the state. This represents one of, if not the largest samples for a public opinion survey ever conducted in a state. By comparison, many of the national polls use a sample size of less than 2000 for the entire United States. The extremely large sample size gives a degree of confidence in the results (less than one percent error) and a degree of specificity which are unparalleled. The telephone survey focused on victimization issues as well as the opinions of the citizens regarding the nature of violent crime in the past and the future.

The mailed survey, managed by Dr. Moriarty, involved a printed questionnaire, nine pages in length, covering questions on topics such as fear of crime, victimization, perception of risk, causes of crime and satisfaction with the criminal justice system. The survey employed a sensitizing postcard and resulted in an adjusted response rate of 58 percent. This response rate is a good one and allows the generalization of the results to the population.

The analysis of social and economic data, conducted by Dr. Dean, sought to identify factors with strong relationships to reported violent crime. Over 200 variables were examined and relationships to county levels of violent crimes for 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1990 were tested.

The results of the assessment, as well as a more detailed discussion of violent crime in North Carolina and the methodologies employed, are fully contained in the "Final Report" of the North Carolina Violent Crime Assessment Project. Presented in this Executive Summary is a sample of the results.

Some of these results are compared to official data of reported crime in 1990. These data are those crimes reported to police and reported by police to central data-collecting agencies. It has always been known that these reported crimes under-estimated crime. It is evident only now how few crimes are made known to police. The victimization rates reported in this document do not necessarily represent an increase or decrease over previous rates. Since this is the first extensive survey of its type, no base-line data are available. What is evident is that there is far more violent crime than expected considering official crime reports.

VICTIMIZATIONS

- o The robbery rate in North Carolina in 1991 was 1289 robberies or attempted robberies per 100,000 citizens, a rate 8 times that shown by official reports for 1990.
- o More than one percent of the women in North Carolina were victims of rape or attempted rape in 1991. This rate is 15 times higher than the rate of reported rape in 1990.
- o Almost 15 of every 1000 North Carolinians were assaulted with weapons in 1991, a rate more than three times the rate reported to police in 1990.
- o More than two percent of the citizens of North Carolina were attacked, hit or beaten up in 1991.
- o More than half of the victims of robbery or attempted robbery in 1991 were women, a rate far greater than criminological literature indicates.
- o Women are more likely than men to suffer multiple victimizations of robbery.
- o Women are as likely to be attacked with weapons by family members or relatives (34 percent) as they are by strangers (34 percent).
- o Women are more likely than men to be victims of multiple aggravated assaults and other assaults.
- o The age group 18 through 22 years was more likely to be victims of rape, aggravated assault and assault in 1991.

- o Native American females were victims of rape at a rate five times more than expected. They were three times more likely to be raped than black females and almost seven times more likely to be raped than white females in 1991.
- o Women ages 18 through 22 were four times more likely to be raped than older age groups in 1991.

Fear of crime, often difficult to measure, is arising as a major "quality of life" issue. This project measured fear as well as "perception" of victimization, which can be a stronger, more debilitating issue.

FEAR AND PERCEPTION OF VIOLENT CRIME

- o While the "Violent Crime Victimization Rate" for North Carolina was 5,793 per 100,000 citizens, more than 57,000 per 100,000, or 57 percent said that there was an area right around their home where they were afraid to walk alone at night.
- o Over 19 percent of the citizens of North Carolina said that fear of crime prevents them from doing things they would like to do.
- o Almost 75 percent worry about their loved ones being hurt by criminals.
- o Almost half of the citizens of the state fear being a victim of violent crime.
- o One in four residents of North Carolina feel that it is "likely" that they will be the victim of a robbery next year.
- o Thirteen of every 100 people in the state are very fearful of being the victim of a violent crime.

The "causes of violent crime" are very difficult to assess. Citizens perceptions of the causes, however, can be measured and were measured in this project. The following list represents the items which the respondents selected most often as the causes of violent crime. Beside each is the percent of citizens who selected the item.

CAUSES OF VIOLENT CRIME

- o Use of drugs (95.6 percent)
- o Criminal Justice System too easy (75.3 percent)
- o Breakdown in family life (74 percent)
- o Use of alcohol (73.6 percent)
- o Moral decay (68.3 percent)
- o Parental discipline (66.7 percent)
- o Availability of guns (59.7 percent)
- o Television and movie violence (54.9 percent)
- o Gangs (54.5 percent)
- o Economy (53 percent)

The social, demographic and economic factors which are thought to influence violent crime abound. The most significant findings in this analysis are:

- o Counties in North Carolina with high rates of violent crime also have high rates of children in single-parent homes. This was the strongest, most consistent relationship found in the analysis.
- o The relationship between counties with high rates of violent crime and high proportions of non-white residents holds for urban areas only.
- o Counties with high rates of possession and sale of drugs also have high violent crime rates.
- o There is a statistically significant relationship between violent crime rates and infant mortality rates. Counties in the middle range of infant mortality rates have the highest rates of violent crime.
- o While not statistically significant, poverty rates were inversely related to violent crime rates.

- o Forty-two percent of all officially reported violent crime occurs in the six larger cities that contain only 19 percent of the population of the state.

These data present a dismal picture: Violent crime is at epidemic proportions in North Carolina. Even more dismal is the victim-offender relationships. For each of the victimization questions, the respondents were asked to specify their relationship to the offender as stranger, acquaintance, someone well known but not a family member and, finally, a family member. The following are examples of the results:

- o Almost two-thirds of the women who were victims of rape or attempted rape said the offenders were well known to them (45.5 percent) or family members (21.8 percent).
- o Over 60 percent of the victims of aggravated assaults were attacked by strangers.
- o A disturbing number of assaults occurred within the family. More than 12 percent of aggravated assaults, 11 percent of threats and almost 15 percent of other assaults were between family members. These are often unreported crimes.

Almost 64 percent of the citizens of North Carolina believe that violent crime in their community has increased. An even greater number, 66.6 percent believe that violent crime in their community will increase during the next three years. Only a very small minority feel that violent crime has decreased (2.5 percent) or will decrease in the future (5.1 percent). More than half of the citizens rate the job being done by their law enforcement agencies as "excellent" or "good." More than 80 percent, however, said that they thought a convicted offender should "serve the full sentence" when sent to prison and not be released early for any reason. More than half of North Carolinians keep a gun in their homes for protection from criminals.

Before this project commenced, policy makers and criminal justice officials knew that the violent crime problem was serious. This research shows that it is far more serious than expected. Armed with information, decisions can be made and policies enacted which address the specific problems in specific regions and groups of citizens. Information is a necessity to combat violent crime. This project provides such information.