

Underreporting and manipulating crime statistics for various reasons has been a problem within police agencies throughout the United States for decades. The motivation to manipulate crimes can range from underreporting to make a city appear safer, overreporting to receive more state and federal monies and even manipulating strictly due to staffing and manpower constraints.

In January 1996, a 7<sup>th</sup>-grade girl named Jesine Williams was raped by a male in Philadelphia however the initial responding police officer failed to believe her story. Jesine maintained her story for almost five years, telling Philadelphia PD she knew who her rapist was. DNA evidence finally proved she was right, and her rapist was convicted in December 2000. (Fazlollah, 2001).

Women's groups in the Philadelphia area were not surprised by this case and found that rape statistics had been manipulated and underreported for many years. Jesine's case brought to light Philadelphia PD was dismissing rape complaints, failing to report rape cases, and miscategorized these cases to simplify their work or improve the city's image. If the officers believed the victim was lying, they would categorize the case as "unfounded" which in turn would not be reported in the FBI's Uniformed Crime Reporting system report. (Fazlollah, 2001).

After receiving pressure regarding this case, in 2000 Philadelphia PD began to allow women's rights organizations to monitor the sex crimes division. Anytime a rape case was determined to be false, the women's group was able to review the case and ensure a proper investigation was completed. Philadelphia PD was open about the shortcomings within their sex crimes unit and the desire to right this wrong.

Jesine's case had been entered into the PPDs system using a code that meant a call for service but no crime. Philadelphia PD, as well as many other cities across the country, use codes for "information only report" or something similar. A former Philadelphia sex crimes unit supervisor reported about a third of his division's cases were closed in this manner. (Fazlollah, 2001.)

A driving force for the underreporting of rape cases in Philadelphia was staffing shortages in the sex crimes unit. Until 1999, the sex crimes unit never had any more than nine detectives to investigate the hundreds or even thousands of sex crimes reported. Despite a 60 percent increase in the city's population, the number of investigators in this unit never increased. Due to staffing issues and detectives having no way to keep up, many rape case investigations were left to be investigated and dealt with by street-level officers with much less training. (Fazlollah, 2001).

Accurately reporting these cases might have led to be beneficial for Philadelphia PD. While no agency wants to admit or publish a rise or high number of crimes, especially violent crimes like rape cases, accurately reporting those crimes could assist in policy development, hiring more officers, filling detective spots in divisions, and receiving more training.

As noted by Dr. Fritzvold and Cory Yung in an Iowa Law Review article, reporting data for the Uniform Crime Report can only be done by having intelligent led policing, with better training in understanding reporting, how to report and why it is important. (Fritzvold, 2021) (Yung, 2014). Law enforcement leaders must train their departments and staff to accurately report crime stats in their cities. If statistics are being manipulated, the reason why needs to be determined and corrective action taken.

Correctly reporting numbers not only to the citizens but city officials can often allow departments to get the resources they need whether it be more training, more officers, or in using CompStat data, focusing enforcement actions in a certain area to reduce crimes. Painting an accurate picture to the citizens of any city is part of providing good customer service.

LEPS 550: Data Fluency and Analysis- Assignment 1.1- Crime Data Manipulation and Misrepresentation  
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References:

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