CHILD HOMICIDE AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

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CHILD HOMICIDE AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

A Thesis

by

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Date
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I certify that this student has met the requirements for format contained in the University format manual, and that this thesis is suitable for shelving in the library and credit is to be awarded for the thesis.

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Amy Liu, Ph.D.        Date

Department of Sociology
Abstract

of

CHILD HOMICIDE AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT

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Linh M. Phan

Child homicide, although rare, resonates in all individuals for it threatens the moral and social fabric of the contemporary society. For the last four decades, scholars and social workers have dedicated time and resources to find effective solutions that will eradicate this social phenomenon. Although there are numerous literatures produced about child homicide, very few have focused on the macro-level of the issue, that is, the community context. Using secondary data from the Homicide Reports (SHR), the California Vital Statistics (VS) which provides information on death records, and the 1990 U.S census Bureau for the state of California, this research seeks to understand if and how the environment impact child homicide.

________________________, Committee Chair
Bohsiu Wu, Ph.D.

________________________
Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would not be enough to just say ‘thank you’ to my parents, Lieu Nguyen and Long Phan, for what they have done and sacrificed so that I can be where I am today. I am forever indebted to them for allowing me to follow my heart, and without so many words, let me know that they are proud of me no matter what. I want to thank my siblings, Linh & John Lam, Liem Phan, Oanh Nguyen, my adorable nieces and Nephew; Cindy, Julie and Derek who inspired me to make this world a better place for future generations. Special thanks to my sweetheart, Leonard Ho, for being so caring, understanding and, as cliché as it sounds, for being my rock. A truly fortunate person is not one with wealth and fame, but one that is surrounded by exceptional people. I sincerely love you all very much and a million thanks for reminding me that I am always surrounded by love.

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Bohsiu Wu and Dr. Murphy for their patience and valuable inputs during my writing process. I want to give credit to Dr. Wu, not only because of his guidance with my research, but also because his criminology class was what sparks my interests in criminal sociology.

Finally, because every experience is a lesson-learned and a chance for self-improvement, I would like to dedicate this thesis to all the people I have crossed path with and all the obstacles I had overcame. Whether negative or positive, I know that the lessons were invaluable.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In her book, *Child Homicide*, Dr. Ania Wilczynski (1997) wrote “few crimes arouse such horror, fascination and anxiety as the killing of children” (5). The death of a child is unfortunate and tragic, especially when the killing of the child is intentional. As documented by Strang (1996), child homicide is sometimes referred to as immoral because, although rare, every occurrence creates huge outpouring of public outrage and concern (2). It is what the public would consider as a crime against morality. In recent years, two of the highly publicized cases which brought into light the subject that is rarely discussed were that of Sandra Cantu and Caylee Anthony. These children’s deaths signify the failure of the government to provide sufficient protection for children.

On April 6, 2010, the body of 8 year old Sandra Cantu was found in a suitcase, discarded in an irrigation pond in Tracy, California. The coroner ruled the child’s death as a case of ‘homicidal asphyxiation.’ Following the discovery of her body, thousands gathered in the city of Tracy to honor the life of the little girl that they considered as “their little girl” (New York Times 2009: 18). Prior studies mainly focused on the mental state of mind of the perpetrators but not on the environment in which the perpetrator(s) had lived in. Melissa Huckaby, the woman convicted for Sandra’s murder, was a Sunday school teacher and a devout Christian. Therefore, her past did not raise suspicion or
would have indicated she was responsible for this horrific act. Unfortunately, Sandra was not the first child homicide case to catch public’s attention. On December 2008, Caylee Anthony, a toddler from Florida who disappeared on June 2008, was found dead near the Anthony’s home in Florida. The child’s death was ruled as ‘homicide under undetermined means’ and her mother, Casey Anthony, was arrested and indicted for first-degree murder. Sandra Cantu and Caylee Anthony are some prime examples of child homicide cases which the public regarded as a crime against virtue. Most societies place significant value upon children as they are believed to be helpless, fragile and innocent. Perhaps these beliefs were the reasons behind the dismay and confusion as to why someone could inflict harm upon children.

It is sometimes difficult to conclude that a child’s death is a case of homicide since the incident often takes place in a home or a private setting where there is a higher chance of the child’s demise being accidental, because the abuse could range from minimal injuries, such as bruises, to fatality. For this reason, medical literature has defined child abuse as the visibility of unexplained children’s bone fractures revealed by radiography (Cradock 2011: 365), whereas child homicide is defined as the killing of a child. Child homicide is defined as a deliberate act of killing a child, which differentiates from fatal child abuse (meaning deaths that resulted from physical abuse and neglect).
Further, while academic studies have pointed out that homicide per se is a rare phenomena, child homicide is even more unusual in that it receives a great deal of public inquiry for the reason that “nothing unites modern society more than its condemnation of child abuse” (Cradock 2011: 363). Research done by Wilczynski (1997) indicated that child homicide perpetrators share some commonalities such as financial and housing problems, unemployment, low educational attainment, etc. Moreover, it was found that, from birth to eleven years of age, children are at the highest risk of being abused by their family.

According to Friedman, Horwitz and Resnick (2005) the United States has the highest child homicide cases compared to other developed nations such as Canada and England. Studies on this subject reveal that “children under one are at the greatest risk of homicide, and that this risk declines steadily with age” (Wilczynski 1997: 86). This is due to the dependency of young children upon their caretakers, particularly for young parents who do not have adequate resources to assist them in caring for their young ones. Furthermore, younger parents, especially those with low educational attainment, low income, and with little or no support from their family and communities, are more likely to neglect and abuse their children. Due to the fact that child homicides are more difficult to document, the rate of children being murdered may be higher than what is on record. In 2001, the U.S. Department of Justice produced documentation which stated
that ‘women are responsible for 43 percent of the deaths of children under the age of 12…” (Finklehor and Ormrod 2001:9). This evidence suggests that, for child homicide victims under 11 years of age, the perpetrators are predominantly females and/or those who do not have a high school degree, living in poverty and have minimal support. Hence, female empowerment (i.e. number of females in the labor force) and community disadvantages (i.e. median income, divorce rate, crime rates and educational attainment) should be explored, since it may be the contributing factors in child homicide.

A few centuries ago, some cultures believed that killing children is justifiable since it “control family size and weed out weak, abnormal, deformed and illegitimate children, and limit the number of females” (Liem and Koenraadt 2008: 167). For instance, in an over-populated country such as China, the effort to conserve resources was demonstrated in the Chinese government’s policy of ‘One-Child’ per family. In addition to the emphasis on the importance of having a son to carry-on the family name, boys are seen as more economically sound as they will be able to carry out more labor-intensive tasks, thus, there is more pressure to ‘eliminate’ the female child. Consequently, in the 21st century, the motives behind child homicide still revolved around economic, cultural and other psychological issues, all of which plagues the low-income population.
Although the killing of children is committed by both genders, females are found to be the most common perpetrators when examining children eleven and under (Gauthier, Chaudoir and Forsyth 2003: 394). Mothers tend to commit child homicide when the children are much younger (Liem et al. 2008: 168). According to Kunz and Bahr (1996), homicide ranks fourth as the “Leading cause of death among U.S. children…” The general consensus is that infanticide is committed by the parents or other family members of the child. The social context in which the crime takes place is still unclear since in some instances, child homicide may be similar to ‘accidental’ deaths. It seems that, when child homicide is being attributed to economic hardships, one can support Roach and Gursslin’s (1965) statement that “the material conditions of economic deprivation pervade the lives of most lower class persons” (508). Such findings support the notion that child homicide correlates with the community context.

Early research literatures have focused on the individual aspect of child homicide, with little attention being paid to community context factors. Gender, race and socioeconomic status are characteristics of a community; hence the purpose of this research is to determine if child homicide is linked to community structure. Communities with scarce resources and low paying jobs are more likely to consider children as financial liabilities, which lead to the likelihood of child homicide. Therefore, the element of community context is important in understanding the nature of child
homicide. Presently, few studies on child homicide have examined the community context such as racial composition, ethnic heterogeneity, socioeconomic structure, etc. Research that has covered the topic of child homicide is usually at an individual level and not on the macro level of the issue. Thus, the purpose of this research is to determine if child homicide is linked to community structure and women’s subordinate position within this structure, in essence, community context. Hence, the question raised in this research is how does community context influence child homicide? In this study, the researcher proposes that communities of lower socioeconomic status, along with lower female labor participation, will result in higher occurrences of child homicide.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies show that several causes and correlates are associated with the occurrence of child homicide. For instance, Hunnicutt (2007) suggested that the rate of child homicide in rural areas is lower than in urban regions. The reason Hunnicutt (2007) offered is that, although women’s status in rural provinces is not as high as women in the cities, there is more stability in the family arena. Women in disadvantaged communities are in a more disadvantaged situation than are men in disadvantaged communities, so their likelihood of committing child homicide may be higher as a result. Other motivations for child homicide are mercy killing, where the perpetrator aimed “to stop or prevent the child’s suffering” (Kriseher, Stone, Sevecke and Steinmeyer, 2007: 191). Mental instability, vengeance as well as previous history of abuse were also found to be the causes for child killing.

The most prevalent reasons that were discussed within research literature, such as one written by Koenen and Thompson, Jr. (2008), were that child homicide is a “complex behavior resulting from a combination of psychological and social factors” (72). It is found that socioeconomic stressors (Harris, Hilton, Rice and Eke 2007: 86) and community support have tremendous effect on the individual’s violent behaviors toward their children. Early studies have discovered that neighborhoods that are disorganized
may lead to weak social networks (Kingston, Huizinga and Elliot 2009: 55). Additionally, the scarcity of resources can impact the ability of a community to regulate deviant behaviors and destabilized social cohesiveness. Further, Kingston et al (2009) have found that, “collective efficacy is the emergent process by which neighborhood social ties are activated within social networks to enhance social control and demonstrate that rates of violence are lower in neighborhoods characterized by high levels of collective efficacy” (56). Communities comprised of mutual trust and solidarity among neighbors ultimately reduce in crimes. The inability to sustain social order, along with weak informal social networks, creates an environment that allows deviant behaviors to continue. Population heterogeneity, which includes the diversity in values, in cultural backgrounds, and in languages, can effect on shared values or collective efficacy. The individual’s mobility (such as constantly relocating) also impedes the strength of social networks. Essentially, the more mobile the individuals, the less likelihood it is for them to form an authentic relationship with others. Single-parent households affect neighborhood surveillance due to their inability to perform both childcare and participate in community activities.

Disorganized neighborhoods are characterized by low income, population heterogeneity, residential mobility and single-parent households and therefore child abuse is more common in lower income households (Fiala and LaFree 1988: 433). The trend
seems to be that the lower class displays the highest rates of various characteristics of social disorganization. For instance, Wu (2009) stated that “inadequate public housing and transportation became formidable obstacles to maintaining effective social networks” (22). These studies confirmed that crimes are more prevalent among neighborhoods with limited mobility, in concern with transportation to and from work, as well as weak communal ties amongst residents. In neighborhoods with high levels of poverty, the formation of social networks is essential to the welfare of the communities.

Neighborhood social structure influences the levels of social support, social cohesiveness, and informal social control, and the availability of resources generated at the neighborhood level. The structural characteristics of disorganized neighborhoods (e.g. population heterogeneity, residential mobility, single-parent households, and concentrated poverty) are likely to impede the formation of strong prosocial networks, informal social controls, educational, recreational, and health resources” (Kingston et al 2009: 57). It was found that child homicide is the result of “stress caused by economic hardships associated with inequality, poverty, and unemployment” (Fiala and LaFree 1988, 433). Socio-economic status of the individual is an important factor in child homicide due to the stress of financial hardships. Understanding the relationship between Community factors and crime is important because social control has proven to reduce crimes and victimization (Feinberg 2009: 1830). This is because social organization
serves to regulate communities and deviant behaviors. A strong social network among
the individuals within the community allows for the exchange of information, enhancing
the relationship among community members and, ultimately, reducing violent behaviors.

Several explanations have been offered to explain why women are the most
common perpetrators in child homicides. First, women who committed child homicide
often confessed that the reasons behind their actions were (1) mental illness; (2)
retaliation or seeking revenge against their domestic partner; (3) unwanted child; or (4)
an attempt to prevent the child’s suffering (mercy killing) (Krischer, Stone, Sevecke and
Steinmeyer 2007: 191). Secondly, the social status of women in society has proven to be
an influential factor in child homicide. As maintained by radical feminists, gender
inequality increases the rates of homicide (Vieraitis and Kovandzic 2008: 166). Research
found that female presence in the labor force correlated highly with child abuse. Also,
single mothers who are sole economic provider for their families influenced the rates of
child abuse (Fiala and LaFree 1988: 434). It was concluded that a large number of
females in the labor force decreased the rates of child abuse. Thus, economically
depressed, single-parent, along with little resources (i.e. childcare), heightened the
likelihood of children getting abused (Fiala and LaFree 1988: 434). Essentially, of the
main factor of child abuse lies in the level of access of resources for families with young
children who are facing economic stress. The financial difficulties, social isolation,
pressure from work and single-parent are a few of the reasons for child abuse (Krischer et al 2007: 192). Women’s social status was found to be linked to the rates of child abuse. The social environment of the single mother is found to associate with the probability of child abuse.

Theory: Social Disorganization Theory

Tibbetts and Hemmens (2010) wrote that delinquent behaviors directly result from weak ties within the community. From Culture of Violence to Durkheim’s Social facts and anomie, there are numerous theories developed over the years to explain crimes and deviant behaviors. To understand the issue of child homicide, this paper will employ Social Disorganization Theory, which asks, “What is it about the modern cultures that contribute to crimes?” Perhaps it is the lack of social bonding that affected the individual, preventing them from forming a support group that is vital to their well-being. Minority groups that are residually and culturally isolated will develop their own set of rules that often condone violence. Social Disorganization theory focuses on the lack of community cohesiveness and how this leads to the tendency to normalize intimate violence. The theory states that poverty, residential instability and ethnic diversity all impacts the community’s ability to regulate violence. In other words, it is structural factors, not individual level factors that affect violence. Social Disorganization coincides with Durkheim’s social facts since it re-examines issues that were once thought
to belong in the private spheres as structural phenomena that, if not resolved, can cause society to deteriorate.

A common question that is asked is can “financial strain reaches a point of violence?” (Diem and Pizarro 2010: 521). Studies have shown that communities with little resources and weak social ties tend to have higher crime rates. Lane and Mecker (2004) utilized Social Disorganization Theory to explain how “urban areas that have more poverty also tend to have high residential mobility and racial ethnic diversity, and therefore, experience more crime.” This theory proposed that, perhaps due to institutionalized racism and scarce resources in diverse neighborhoods, violence against children is more prevalent. Social disorganization reflects on the inability of residents to identify and to address community needs, hence, creating turmoil within and among individuals (Feinberg 2009: 1830). Additionally, high poverty levels, unstable family structure (Cullen and Agnew 2003: 114) are factors in the disorganization of the community which caused the rising of criminal activities. According to Social Disorganization theory, social support is vital to the prevention of intimate violence and increasing the ability of the “community’s capacity to shape the formation, maintenance, and content of intimate relationships” (Browning, 2002: 848).

*Social Support Theory*
A more specific explanation for child homicide is provided by the Social Support theory. Deriving from “Braithwaite’s (1989) concept of reintegrative shaming, Coleman’s (1990) research on ‘social capital,’ and Cullen’s (1994) discussion of ‘social support as an organizing concept for criminology” (Worrall 2009: 125), social support theory states that communities can instill a sense of morality and social responsibility amongst its citizens. It contests that a society with monetary gain as its main objective will most like have high rates of crimes. This, the theory argues, is the consequence of a society that lacks morality, and a sense of community. Similar to Durkheim’s social facts and social disorganization theory, social support theory brings attention to importance of community cohesiveness. It surmised that, if a community is willing to aid those in need, crime rates will decline. A ‘market society’ preoccupies itself too much with economic gain and too little on the welfare of those who are living in it. Such societies create institutions with no ‘capacity to regulate human passions and behaviors’” (Worrall 2009: 126). This leads to individuals with little support to make any decisions free from the market forces.

*Hypothesis 1: Female Empowerment*

Based on previous literatures, there are two competing hypotheses on child homicide that are focused on the macro level. One is that female empowerment, which argued that the ability for women to participate in the labor force, in addition to attaining
higher education, will enable women to greater access to resources, thus preventing child homicide. Results from Hunnicutt and LaFree (2008) found that the status of women in a society correlates with the rate of infant victimization. Here, we are considering child homicide as a dependent variable that is being influenced by various independent variables such as family structure, economic stress, female economic status, culture of violence, institutional intervention and access to healthcare and control.

Contemporary society still faces one of the oldest issues that prevents real progress: gender stratification. “Several feminist theories predict that women’s socioeconomic status, both absolute status and their status relative to men, influences the prevalence of violence…” (Vieraitis, Kovandzic and Britto 2008: 163). Traditionally, women have always been portrayed and regarded as the weaker sex, occupying the status of second-class citizens. Marxist Feminists argue that the division of labor in capitalist society situated women mainly in the role of the caretakers or supporters of male laborers (Vieraitis et al. 2008: 165). Because women were always cast into domesticated roles, particularly those who are less educated, they are limited in resources. Hunnicutt and LaFee (2008) believed that female labor force participation, low levels of spending on social programs and low education attainment equates to higher rates of child homicide. The lack of proper training in labor skill and education restrains women from becoming successful and/or accessing resources that will assist them. It was also found that
“women who are younger, often unwed, and disadvantaged in terms of class or of a minority race” (Hunnitcutt and LaFee 2008: 395) are more likely to kill their children. Patriarchal dominancy, Isser and Schwartz (2008) wrote, pushes women into committing crimes. There is a constant struggle for power, control and opportunity between the sexes (Isser and Schwartz 2008: 579). Ahmad, Riaz, Barata and Stewart (2004) wrote that patriarchal societies have in it, “a set of ideas and beliefs that justify male domination over women in society” (262). Thus, women are constantly subjected to segregated gender roles particularly in disadvantaged communities where women tend to have lower educational attainment, high unemployment rates and/or living with a single income. Gauthier et al. (2003) posited that economic stress escalates aggression in mothers. Unwed and young mothers tend are more prone to child abuse as a result of minimal support from internal (family) and external (public programs) institutions. In essence, I hypothesize that communities with lower female empowerment will have higher rates of child homicide.

Hypothesis 2: Community Disadvantages

The second hypothesis focuses on how community disadvantage may lead to child homicide. Child homicide is more prevalent in areas that have the lowest social spending (Gauthier et. al 2003: 396). In essence, communities with fewer resources will have higher crime rates, poorer living conditions. Because we are what Worrall (2009)
referred to as a ‘market society,’ communities with low levels of resources leaves its members without proper preparation for success. Furthermore, the author believes that a society that defines success in terms of monetary achievement tends to overlook other important institutions that govern human behaviors and eradicate self-regulation. Aron, McCrowell, Moon, Yamano, Roark, Simmons, Tatanashvili, and Drake (2010) believed that child abuse reaches high levels in communities that are experiencing high level of poverty. Thus, the community’s well-being is found to be related to the child’s welfare.

Family structures are more likely to affect infant victimization. Specifically, the “percentage of teen births, battle deaths, and female labor force participation all increase infant homicide victimization” (Hunnicutt and LaFree 2008: 47). The lack of government spending on social welfare programs further exacerbates the situation. Various studies have suggested that child homicides are most common among younger parent(s), in their late teens to early twenties. It is believed that social factors such as education, occupation, community, etc. contribute to child abuse. Hunnicutt and LaFree (2008) proposed that we should focus on this issue at a macro, structural level and stray away from the individual, psychological level. Factors such as “…economic stress, social disorganization, culture of violence, and social isolation” (Hunnicutt and LaFree 2008: 47) may contributed to child abuse.
If capitalism can lead to crime, then community structure greatly impacts the level of success of community members. Worrall (2009) stated that social support “may increase family efficacy and promote better parenting practices… and it may even be a necessary precondition for effective social control.” Social control can lead to self-governing of crime and deviance, including violent behaviors such as homicide. This could be traced back to Durkheim’s *social facts*, which refers to the importance of community cohesiveness. The support of one’s community greatly affects one’s behavior in that the individual, with a sense of togetherness, will feel more comfortable in seeking assistance. Fundamentally, it is vital to look at a community, especially the disadvantaged ones, at a macro-level. Researchers must begin to study the structure of the neighborhood and the racial composition. And so, it is hypothesized that communities with fewer disadvantages will have lower rates of child homicide.
Chapter 3
DATA & METHODS

This research will be using data sources provided by The Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR), collected by the FBI, the California Vital Statistics (VS) which provides information on death records, and the 1990 U.S census Bureau for the state of California. The SHR and the VS serve different purposes and therefore both reports include and exclude various information, depending on their specific objectives (Van Court and Trent 2004: 312). The yearly data of SHR and VS ranges from 1990 through 1999, 34,542 cases from the SHR was linked with 32,122 cases from VS. Then, the two datasets were combined into one system labeled, by Van Court (2004), as the California Vital Statistic and Homicide Data This combined final dataset will be used for this research. This dataset includes race of victims, sex of victims, relationship of victims and offenders, location in which the victims were killed, and the methods (firearms, asphyxiation, stabbing, etc.) in which the victims were killed by.

Presently, defining ‘community’ is challenging since there is not one universal definition that can be used to measure the variable. In previous research, counties have been used to measure community. However, due to the fact that California contains very few counties, zip codes were a better fit as the unit of measurement for communities. By using Zip-codes as a pseudo measurement of community, this research can gain some
perspectives of the “dynamics linking homicides and other predictors” (Wu 2009:12). Variables regarding community, size of population, socioeconomic status and racial composition will be taken from the census data from 1990.

This research will initially utilize descriptive statistics to present a rudimentary report. Giving that child homicide is a very unusual incident; the description of child homicide across California zip codes is not evenly distributed. In order to measure the occurrences of child homicide, a unique procedure will be exploited. Originally developed to modify over-dispersed Poisson data, negative binomial regression is the most compatible since it was created to measure the frequency of occurrences. Hence, negative binomial regression will be the method employed to analyze the effects of several indicators linking to child homicide (Wu 2009: 14).

Friedman, Horwitz and Resnick (2005) and Wilczynski (1997) have found that young children are at the greater risk of being murdered due to their reliance on their care-takers. Thus, the dependent variable in this research is homicide victims eleven years of age and under. Moreover, the variable will consist of the sum of child homicide victims from 1990 to 1999 in each zip code in the state of California.

There are various social influences that affect child homicide. Variables such as median income, female empowerment (measured by examining the numbers of female in
the workforce), linguistic isolation, which measures the percentage of individual with English as their second language, divorce rate. Lastly, community disadvantage will be measured using the disadvantage index constructed as the average standardized scores (Wu 2009:14) made up with the following indicators: percentage of adults sixteen and older who are unemployed, percentage of adults over twenty-five who do not have a high school degree, the percentage of the population that is black, the percentage of households head by females, and the percentage of household living in poverty. All these coefficients will be measured at a zip-code level using Negative binomial regression.

Included in the negative binomial regression table will be homicide 1990 and population 15-29. These coefficients serve as control variables to determine if child homicide is affected by the main variables or is simply a reflection of homicide counts in general. So, to ensure that the independent variables (Community disadvantages, Isolation, Divorce rate, Social cohesion, Median income and female labor force participation) truly affect the dependent variable (child homicide), control variables (homicide 1990 and population 15-29) are necessary.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

Table 1: Age Distribution of Homicide Victims in California: 1990-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 and under</td>
<td>1422</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 and older</td>
<td>32691</td>
<td>94.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34113</td>
<td>98.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Valid | 34113

Missing system | 429 | 1.2 |

Total | 34542 | 100.0 |

The extent of child homicide in the state of California has not been researched thoroughly since most early works mainly focused on the micro level of the crime. That is, most attention has been paid to the individual and not to the structural level. In not examining child homicide in a more comprehensive manner, certain details may have been overlooked. Such oversight was noted by Finkelhor (1997) when he concluded that more children have died from homicides than cancer and other various contagions.

The 2000 census reported that there were 6,283,184 children eleven and under in the State of California (about 19% of the entire State’s populations). Table 1-A above
displays two categories: child homicide (eleven and under) and non-child homicide (twelve and older) cases. According to the results rendered, out of 34,113 homicide cases in California, 4% of homicide cases involving children eleven and under is valid. In the second category of victims who are twelve and older, 96% of which is valid with 1% were reported as missing. The disparity between two categories can be detected as the majority (96%) of homicide victims are those twelve years and older.

The legal definition of child homicide does not include various forms of maltreatment such as gross negligence (i.e. leaving a child unattended near that stairs and he/she falls to his/her death) (Finkelhor 1997: 23). Such fatality is not considered as a criminal act, thus, not included in child homicide reports. Additionally, some states will not consider a child’s death as homicide unless it is reported as so. Because of these classification issues, the number of child homicides may be underreported.
Table 2: Bivariate Cross-tabulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Homicide victims</th>
<th>Eleven and under</th>
<th>Twelve and older</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race of victim</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>67.1%</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex of Victim</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>83.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-family</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>84.9%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other location</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weapons</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firearms</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal weapons (non-firearms)</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01
Child homicide is a social phenomenon that deserves further examination. This research seeks to find if there is correlation between child homicide and community factors. As past research has documented, homicides are more frequent in neighborhoods that display various characteristics such as “…poverty and residential instability” (Boggess and Hipp 2010: 352).

Table 2 above includes information regarding race, sex, relationship, location, and weapons for two groups; homicide victims aged 11 and under and homicide victims aged 12 and over. Children eleven years of age and under represented 19% of the overall population in California. To break down further, 51% of the 6,283,184 are white, 25% are black and 24% are of other races. There are 31,959 cases of homicides recorded from 1990 to 1999 and 1,129 of which are victims under eleven years of age. The cross tabulation between age of victims and the race of the victims above suggested that, of all the child homicides being documented, 67% (N=758) of homicide victims involved white children, followed by black children with 24% (N=273) and finally, other race (i.e. Asian, Hispanics, Native American Indian, Pacific islanders) with about 9% (N=98). As presented in Table 2, child homicides are high for white and black children, but significantly low for children of other race. These numbers stay consistent for the homicide aged 12 and over category, meaning whites remains extremely high as homicide victims, blacks were the second highest group and other race are the lowest.
Interestingly, when examining homicide cases within the race groups, white victims, twelve and older decreased by about 2% (from 67.1% to 65.2%) and other race victims slightly decreased to almost 3% (from 8.7% to 6.2%) as they get older while homicides among black victims who are twelve and older increased to almost 5% (from 24.2% to 28.7%).

The end-product of this cross-tabulation indicated that the numbers of white victims in child homicide cases are substantially higher than that of black and children other race. When comparing with the corresponding percentage in the general population, white children are over-represented in child homicide rates, as they are 67% of victims but only 50% of the total population of children in California. However, black children who are victims of homicide is about 1% lower than the percentage of black children in the general population their total population while children of other race are under-represented with only 9% whom are homicide victims when they make up about 24% of all children residing in California. White individuals dominated in homicide in the ‘twelve and older’ category as well. As predicted, race is a significant factor in child homicide. Although children from infant to five years of age are at the highest risk of being victims of homicide (Finkelhor and Ormrod 2001: 7), those in middle childhood (from the age of six to eleven) are at risk of being murdered as well. Despite their
progress in verbal skill and physical independence, children of middle childhood still rely on their caretakers tremendously, therefore, rendering them vulnerable to abuse.

California is the home of 6,283,184 children under the age of eleven. 51% (N=3,217,579) of which are male and 49% (N=3,065,605) are female. Of 1,129 homicide cases involving children in California, 55% (N=624) of which are male and about 45% are female under eleven years of age. The number of young male victims is worth noting, taking into account there is about 51% of the entire ‘eleven and under’ population are boys yet 55% are homicide victims. In contrast, young females are about 45% (N=505) of homicide cases, which is about 4% less than the entirety of young females in California. In table 2, it appears that there is a positive correlation for child homicide and gender. Males, in general, are killed more often than females in both age groups. Moreover, table 2 indicates that homicide increased by about 28% (from 55.3% to 83.7%) for males twelve and older, while female homicide decreased by 28% (from 44.7% to 16.3%). Results in table 2 disclosed what was divulged by previous research suggesting that male children account for majority of child homicide cases. Sex of the victims is also statistically significant in children being killed, as demonstrated in the above table.

Children are more likely to be killed by their caretakers (i.e. family members) because young children are more dependent upon their caregivers. To test this
hypothesis, this research utilized cross-tabulation to find if the child(ren)’s relatives are more likely to murder the child(ren) than non-family. The cross-tabulation identifies ‘family’ as those who have familial ties and/or relation by marriage with the victims (i.e. parent(s), stepparent(s), siblings, spouse, aunts and uncles) and non-family. The results in table 2 confirm that family members are common perpetrators.

In the first row of table 2, it was calculated that there are 1,318 cases of child homicide including both family and non-family as perpetrators. There are 69% (N=912) young children being murdered by their family members, while non-family account for about 31% (N=406) of child homicide cases. When children enter the ‘twelve and older’ bracket, non-family were found to be more common perpetrators. The results generated by the tables above shown that family influenced the counts of child homicide. Evidence in table 2 also confirmed that children are more likely to be killed by family members than non-family. Because the chi-square for family is p<.01, the final outcome of table 2 is statistically significant.

Child homicide cases, at times, are not documented accurately given that the nature of the child’s death may be accidental or deliberate. Table 2’s illustrated that most of child homicide cases occurred within the home or private spheres. When crime takes place in a secluded area, it is difficult to determine the cause of death in a clear manner since there would be no witness, other than the victim and the perpetrator. As
shown in table 2, for children under eleven years of age, most are killed within the home. Out of 1,395 cases of child homicide, about 85% (N=1,185) of the child homicide cases took place in the home and only 15% were committed outside of the home. This result is expected as young children are kept in the home more. Outside of the home, 68% of victims are twelve and older while only 32% of the victims are eleven and under. The results revealed that, as the victims gets older, the location in which they are being killed in began to deflect from the private arena (34.7%) and into more public settings (65.3%).

This finding is consistent with several characteristics discovered in child homicide cases. For instance, young children are more exposed to family violence because and they inhabit the home/private vicinity the most and that they are more likely to be murdered at the hands of their parents/guardians. Also, child homicides are hard to document due to the nature of the crime is similar to accidental deaths due to the narrow definition of what constitutes as child homicide. As predicted, location in which the child is killed is an important element in child homicide.

Non-firearms are the most prevalent method found in child homicides. Perpetrators frequently murder their children by “strangulation, batter or suffocation” (Finkelhor and Ormrod 2001: 6). In Table 2, we see that 1,422 cases of homicide involved children eleven and younger are placed into three classifications: firearms, personal weapons (non-firearms) and other. Firearms, handguns, rifles, and shotguns
made up the category of ‘firearms.’ Personal weapons (non-firearms) method includes blunt object, asphyxiation and personal object (hands and feet). Finally, the ‘other’ category was comprised of various methods such as stabbing, neglect, poison, other, drowning, and unknown. Of the overall cases, 18% (N=254) of the child homicide cases involve firearms, an astounding 57% (N=814) were killed by personal weapons (non-firearms), while 25% (N=354) were victims killed by other techniques. Among those who are twelve and older, table 2 revealed that firearms are the most frequently used as it is responsible for 75% (N=24,517) of homicide cases. personal weapons (non-firearms) comprised about 8% (N=2,537) and other styles is responsible for 17% (N=5,637) of homicide victims. The cross-tabulation shows that younger children (eleven and under) are at a higher the risk of being killed by personal methods (i.e. asphyxiation, beating using blunt object, hands and feet).

Chi square test for methods in which the individuals are killed, provided in table 2, signify a relationship between age of the victims and the methods in which they are being killed. Similar to the rest of the independent variables discussed earlier, weapons were statistically significant as well.
The descriptive table displays two numbers; the mean and standard deviation. The mean represents the average score of all the zip codes in California (N = 1,678). The standard deviation measures the level of variability of the scores on each measure among all the zip codes. There are 1,678 zip codes in the State of California. Of the total
homicide cases (N=34,113) in all the counties in California, 1,422 are children eleven and under.

This research contained nine measures critical to understanding child homicide. The Child homicide variable measures child homicide victims eleven and under. The results showed there was an average of .65 child homicide cases in all counties in California, however, the standard deviation (1.331) indicated that there is a high level of variability for child homicide counts in certain zip code – some zip codes account for more child homicide counts than others. So, of all the zip-codes in California (N = 1,678), 71% did not report any child homicide in the last ten years, while 29% indicated that there is at least one child homicide case with eleven being the highest reported in one zip-code. Community disadvantages index was created by combining several components: percentage of individuals living in poverty, percentage of adults without a high school degree, percentage of adults who are unemployed, percentage of African-American population, and percentage of female-headed households. Linguistic isolation refers to percentage of individuals with English as their second language, since social ties can only be formed through communication. Table 3 shows 7% of the study’s population did not speak English as their primary language. Lower linguistic isolation suggests lower social isolation, which leads to stronger social cohesion within the community.
Homicide counts in 1990 and population 15-29 for each zip code were used as control variables for this study, and results suggested that zip codes with the higher homicides reported also displayed high count of child homicides. The average divorced rate among adults in all the zip codes in California is about 11%. Similar to the community disadvantage variable, social cohesion was created by merging various components such as the percentage of foreign-born individuals, percentage of renters and the unit of measurement for linguistic isolation (referring to a census measurement taken from the percentage of people in a household who do not speak English). The findings suggested that, with the standard deviation of 2.588, social cohesion also varied vastly across zip-codes, meaning some communities are less cohesive compared to others. The average income ($47,260.00) may not be a reliable indicator since the standard deviation (21,255) indicates high variability. As for female labor force, the average in each zip code is about 27%. With the standard deviation of 6.568, the variability for this variable is also high.
Table 4: Negative Binomial Regression Models Predicting Child Homicide Victimization at the Zip-code level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community disadvantages</td>
<td>.416***</td>
<td>(.1178)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>(.2727)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population 15-29</td>
<td>.046***</td>
<td>(.0107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homicide 1990</td>
<td>.110***</td>
<td>(.0134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce rate</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>(.0128)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Cohesion</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>(.0632)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Income</td>
<td>5.095E-6</td>
<td>(3.6252E-6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female labor force Participation</td>
<td>.026**</td>
<td>(.0099)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-2.887***</td>
<td>(.4334)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispersion</td>
<td>.7628</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness of Fit</td>
<td>409.87***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: negative binomial coefficients are displayed in the first row and standard deviation are included in the parenthesis.  
*P < .05, **P < .01, ***P < .001
Child homicide counts may just be the result of higher homicide counts in general and not by other factors such as community disadvantage, isolation, female labor force, educational attainment, divorce rates, and median income. To determine if the relationship of the dependent variable is affected by the independent variables or by homicide in general, two variables (homicide 1990 and population 15-29) were added as control variables. Moreover, these variables were added to more accurately find out the exact effect that the independent variables have on child homicide. Based on the regression table, communities with a higher homicide rate in 1990 tend to have a higher child homicide count. This was the same for the ‘population 15-29’ variable. In other words, communities with a higher percentage of young population tend to have a higher child homicide count.

The outcome of the negative binomial regression exposed that both community disadvantages and female labor force are statistically significant, as displayed in Table 4. Community disadvantages was created by compiling percentage of poverty, percentages of adults without High School degree, percentages of adults who are unemployed, percentage of blacks and percentage of female-headed households. Higher scores were coded as higher community disadvantages. Communities experiencing the greatest community disadvantages show the highest count for child homicide. Table 4 illustrated that higher degree of community disadvantages is linked to an increase in child homicide
count. That is, for every standard deviation increase for the variable ‘community disadvantages, there is a 14% increase in child homicide.\(^1\) Although both variables have positive correlation with the dependent variable (child homicide), female labor force participation is not as strong of an indicator. The results revealed that for every standard deviation increase in ‘female labor force,’ there is only about a 4% increase in child homicide.\(^2\)

Since the dependent variable (child homicide) is a count variable, standard deviation is not as strong because of its skewed distribution. By transforming the negative binomial coefficient into a percentage change on the dependent variable, the significance that each predictor carries can be converted into standard deviation scores. For example, in Ordinary least squares regression, the b coefficient cannot be used to compare the strengths from different independent variables because the b coefficient is measured by the unit of each variable which differs greatly. The beta coefficient, which is expressed in the form of standard deviation, is then used to compare relative strengths of

\(^1\)To calculate the level of each significant predictor to determine the percentage change for in the dependent variable (child homicide), the following formula is employed:

\[ \frac{((e^{b \cdot s^2})-1)\times 100}{s} \]

\(^2\)The original dataset included both female labor force participation and percentage of females employed in the professional occupations. However, the percentage of females employed in the professional occupation was dropped from the analysis because the Variance Inflation Factor score was too high when both variables were included. Although the VIF indicated that there is a higher degree of correlation between these two variables, the VIF score has to be lower than 2.5 to run a regression analysis.
different predictors. Therefore, interpreting the negative binomial regression results as a percentage change in the dependent variable for every standard deviation is a more sensible approach.

As seen in table 4, homicide 1990 and population 15-29 are independently associated with child homicide and thus, are predictors of child homicide along with female labor force participation and community disadvantages. The intercept revealed that there is a strong relationship between child homicides and other statistically significant variables (community disadvantages and female labor force). The negative binomial regression table also discovered that there is a goodness of fit between child homicide and community disadvantages as well as female labor force.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Although the counts of child homicide are noticeably high amongst Caucasian children, it could be rationalized that this is due to the fact that white children make up 51% of the entire population of children in California. An explanation as to why the number of white victims in child homicide is disproportionally high comparing to other race groups could be that white children make up for more than half of the total population of children in California. Male children are killed more than female children, as illustrated in table 2. One rationalization presented to explain this occurrence is that boys are “more active and aggressive on average… and may be more difficult to supervise, or treated as needing less care and supervision” (Finckelhor and Omrod 2001: 25). Perhaps this is why deaths of male children are by fatal neglect. Overall, the probability of male children being neglected is higher thus explaining the differences in male and female child homicide.

Even though the homicide counts among children eleven and under are low when comparing to the total number of homicide cases, several factors must be considered. First, the legal definition of child homicide is still not inclusive to other types of abuse. Second, because the narrow classification of the crime, deaths of children are often categorized as ‘accidentals.’ In fact, many states will not consider child fatality as
homicide unless charges are filed, which means that the actual count of child homicide could double that of the number being reported (Finkelhor 1997: 23). Secondly, as seen on table 2, the majority of child homicide takes place within the home where family members are the main perpetrators. Also, young children are often killed by personal weapons (57%), which suggest that the actual count of child homicide may be higher than what is being documented since it is difficult to determine the events that happened in the private sphere leading to the death of the child.

In hypothesis 1 of this research, female empowerment was believed to affect child homicides. Earlier discussion referenced feminists’ stance on females’ economic status or lack thereof in society. It was hypothesized that child homicide is the consequence of low female participation in the labor force, lack of education and training. Marxists feminists concluded that, in a patriarchal society, women are constantly situated in domesticated roles (caretakers) rendering them second-class citizens. If women, feminists argue, are given more opportunities in the workforce as well as in education, crimes (including child homicides) will decrease. Interestingly, in table 4, it appears that high rates of female labor force participation also leads to an increase in child homicide. It should be noted that, comparing to the community disadvantages variable, the correlation between female labor force participation is weaker. This result did not support hypothesis 1 since the hypothesis projected that the number of female
participation in the labor force is one of the main factors that reduced child homicides. Fundamentally, it is not the amount of females in the work force but the types of career (i.e. high paying professions versus working-class jobs) these women must obtain that will lower child homicide counts.

To explain this occurrence, we must revisit what Fiala and LaFree (1988) found in their research, which is that females involved in child homicide are often living in poverty. The outcome could be rationalized that high concentration of female in the low-paying/low status occupation had led to an increase in child abuse because it is not simply just the number of mothers working, but also the types of occupation they obtained. To explain further, the types of profession one obtained will enable the individual to afford certain necessities for their offspring (i.e. daycare). Also, a well-paid career can only be attained with high education, which in turn can only be acquired by those who can access resources. Interestingly, social isolation is not significant in measuring child homicide as expected and discussed by various literatures.

Negative binomial regression results indicated that community disadvantages is the most meaningful indicator in child homicide. The findings support hypothesis 2, which stated that community disadvantages influences child homicides. This result coincides with earlier proposals by Finklehor and Ormrod (2001) and Gauthier et. al (2003), that communities with lack of resources often produced the highest crime rates.
Fiala and LaFree (1988) wrote that child homicide resulted from “stress caused by economic hardships associated with inequality, poverty, and unemployment” (433). It appears that community and crime are interconnected, according to Feinberg (2009). When the community faces obstacles such as poverty, low education, lack of jobs and is primarily occupied by minority groups, crime rates increased. Ultimately, table 4 supported this research’s second hypothesis.

Krischer et al (2007) and Worrall (2009) wrote that social isolation, pressure from work and single-parent are a few of the reasons for child abuse (192). However the findings in this research did not support the authors’ discovery. As presented in table 4, isolation and divorce were not statistically significant. In Tibbetts and Hemmens (2010) and Cullen and Agnew (2003) discussions of Social Disorganization Theory, the authors mentioned that lack of cohesiveness within the community will essentially influenced the individuals’ tendency to normalize intimate violence. Yet, the regression table failed to make this correlation. Contrary to these scholars’ research, social cohesion was statistically insignificant to child homicide.

Based on the discoveries from this project, one may suggest a further discussion in policies developing to aid communities that are lacking resources. From this research, it was concluded that community disadvantages and female labor force correlated with child homicides. As mentioned in the literature review of this study, communities that
exhibit various characteristics such as poverty, high unemployment rate, low educational attainment and high percentage of female-headed households tend to have higher child homicide counts. This outcome reiterated Social Disorganization theory about how low social spending in certain communities leads to higher rates of crime. Whilst the negative binomial regression result supported the first segment of hypothesis 2, it did not support the second part concerning social support. Social support and social cohesiveness were not significant indicators of child homicide.

The results produced by this research found that social dynamics are intertwined with human behaviors. Numerous literatures have been published on child homicide, but very few have analyzed the issue on a macro-level. It is essential to develop a full comprehension of a social problem before an effective solution can be developed. This consideration should be given to all social concerns.

This study encountered several limitations. The first issue was generalizability. Because zip-codes of California were used to measure the state’s counties, the results may not be generalizable nation-wide. It is a possibility that there may be more than one community in each zip-code. And so, using zip-codes as a measure to study community may not be as accurate, since it will over-look the diverse communities that exists in each zip-code. To avoid such a problem, a measurement that emulates the interrelationship of the community needs to be developed. Another limitation is that the measures for social
cohesion (created from three indicators: percentage of foreign-born individuals, percentage of renters and the unit of measurement for linguistic isolation) is not comprehensive enough to signify the level of community’s social ties. This issue is due to the fact that this research uses indirect secondary data, instead of the researcher personally collecting evidence from the residents. To achieve a more in-depth perspective of social cohesion, it would be recommended that future research should utilize a more direct method to study this variable. For instance, researcher may want to survey the level of the individual’s participation in their community, the level of connectedness of the individual to their community, how well they know their neighbors. Further, because the statistical analysis did not permit this study to include both female labor force participation and percentage of females employed in the professional occupation, the result was limited in its perspective on child homicide. Future research should consider examining the percentage of females employed in the professional occupation as a measurement for female empowerment.

This research, of course, only grazed the surface of an issue that needs more extensive examination. Child homicide is a phenomenon that needed to be study from all perspectives, micro and macro-level. And, since numerous literatures were produced to understand the issue from the individual angle, there should be more work produced on a broader outlook, the social environment (i.e. the community) that encompassed and
influenced the actors within. This study established that community disadvantages, along with female labor force participation are the key factors in child homicide. With that said, what needs to be addressed is policies on public spending. One of America’s most popular mottos has always been “children are our future.” Still, we have yet to construct policies effective enough to eradicate this growing social issue. One suggestion this researcher would propose is perhaps more attention should be spend on non-profit organizations to better their community.

We have witness America’s economy flourished and dwindled, yet one thing remained; lack of monetary spending on social programs. Impoverish communities breed social issues since there is lack of resources necessary to obtain a better life. So, in order to reduce, and hopefully eradicate, child homicide, more money should be directed into programs that provide family support as well as higher education for individuals with living in disadvantaged communities. The government should illegalize the practice of healthcare privatization and provide all its citizens the same quality of care, regardless of their income. More programs should be created specifically for women who are single mothers and have little or no income. These programs should entail educational programs that will steer them toward high-paid career and enable them to compete in the market. Additionally, childcare should be included in these programs in effort to ease their burden so that they are able to pursue a better life for themselves and their offspring.
REFERENCES


