

Calling The Cops: How Race/Ethnicity and Gender Contribute to the Perception of the Police in College

Abstract:

Nationally, People of Color report lower levels of trust in the law enforcement compared to their White counterparts. This paper examines this sentiment at a private college in New York, in relation to the campus' police called *Public Safety*. A survey was administered to 391 undergraduates which asked for their race/ethnicity, gender, and the amount of times they have called Public Safety for an emergency. Trust in Public Safety was operationalized by the amount of calls made to them by students; wherein more calls suggest higher amounts of trust. Two-way ANOVA, Logistic Regression, and a Poisson-Hurdle Model all showed only gender to be a significant predictor of calling Public Safety, with Males calling the most. Neither race/ethnicity nor the interaction of race/ethnicity and gender were significant predictors. Implications will be discussed.

Background

The prevalent social climate in the United States of America is one where law enforcement is feared by People of Color (POC). This is mostly because POC are disproportionately targeted and profiled by law enforcement agents. In 2017, Police killed 1,147 people with Black people being 25% of those killed despite making up 13% of the population. The same study found that Black people were three times more likely to be killed by the Police than White people even though 30% of those Black people were unarmed compared to 21% of the White people (Sinyangwe, 2019). It is also pertinent to mention that 13 out of the 100 largest U.S. city police departments kill Black men at higher rates than the United States' average murder rate (Sinyangwe, 2019). The Black Youth Project found that less than half of Black youth (44.2%) trust the Police compared to young people from other racial and ethnic groups (Rogowski & Cohen, 2014).

Research also suggests that the gender of an individual also affects one's experience when interacting with the Police. Due to the gendered policies of many US Police departments (such as only male policemen can search males and vice versa) and because of the male-dominated police force, there exists a dynamic of procedural injustice that is functional upon the gender of an individual (Tyler, 2006 & Reaves, 2015). This results in men and women having vastly different interactions with the police. Moreover, it is very important to consider the intersection of one's identities because those identities introduce a new dimension into one's experience with the Police (Durán, 2008; Katz & Webb, 2006). Novich, Kringen, & Hunt, 2018 found that the police unfairly enforced the law to disadvantage male suspects when compared to female suspects. Research such as this is crucial in ensuring that all people feel safe and equal when interacting with the Police and guarantees harmony.

The goal of this study is to see whether or not race/ethnicity, gender, and the interaction of the two (such as Black Females, White Males) will have different expectations of interactions with a Campus' Police force (Public Safety) at a large, private college in upstate New York. This will be quantified by administering the student body a survey and asking them for the number of times they have called Public Safety in the past academic year, in the case of an emergency. An emergency was described as *"a medical or non-medical emergency that requires immediate Public Safety's attention,"* to control for the plethora of other reasons Public Safety is called for such as Lost & Found, lock-outs, and "safe" rides. To operationalize trust in Public Safety, students were asked to indicate how many times they had called Public Safety; higher amounts of calls indicate higher levels of trust and vice versa. The rationale is that if a student trusts Public Safety then they wouldn't hesitate in calling them; while students with lower levels of trust would generally try other approaches in tackling the emergency. Thus this study has two guiding hypotheses:

1. POC would be less likely to call Public Safety due to high levels of distrust and disproportionate targeting nationally,
2. Male POC would call Public Safety the least due to the disproportionate targeting towards them evidenced at a national level.

Methods

The data was collected through convenience sampling and the participants were given a short survey which asked for their demographical data (i.e. age, gender, race/ethnicity, and class year). Lastly, the survey asked for the number of times they have called Public Safety, in the past academic year, for an emergency. 391 complete responses were collected representing 10% of the total undergraduate population of the College. These 391 participants represented the four major races/ethnicities in the school: Asian (including the Indian subcontinent), Black or African-American, Latinx, and White/Caucasian. Since very little non-binary people took part in the study, the data was categorised as Males and Non-Males (including Females and Non-Binary students). Three inferential statistical tests were run to test the reliability and the validity of the data.

1. **Two-way ANOVA** was chosen to test the differences in mean between the groups of races and genders. Interaction between gender and race/ethnicity was also tested. ANOVA was chosen because it is a versatile test and is robust when the sample size is big enough. The data was not normal in this dataset (there were a lot of 0's signifying no calls to Public Safety) but since $n=391$ we were able to assume that ANOVA conditions would hold.
2. **Binary Logistic Regression** was chosen since the data could easily be converted into binary if the no calls to Public Safety are designated as "0" and one or more call(s) as "1." This will allow for the calculations of the odds of calling Public Safety based on one's race/ethnicity and gender.

3. **Poisson Hurdle Regression** was chosen because the data had a lot of 0's which made the data non-normal. This model is for count data and helps handle excess zeros and over-dispersion. When performing Poisson regression, we're assuming our count data follows a Poisson distribution with a mean conditional on the predictors (Kleiber & Zeileis, 2016). The data was analyzed with the statistical program *Minitab*. The chosen significance level is $\alpha=0.05$.

Results

Of the 391 participants, 77.4% never called Public Safety in the academic year, while 22.6% called at least once. 41.2% of the participants identified as males, 56.9% as females, and 1.9% as non-binary. When asked for racial and ethnic backgrounds, 54% of the participants identified as White, 10.7% as Black, 24.5% as Asians (including the Indian subcontinent), 9.1% as Latinx, and 1.7% as others. This gender and racial breakdown closely mirrors the College's overall population (*Admission's Office*).

Two-way ANOVA

This analysis showed that gender with a p-value of 0.005 was very significant in predicting the calls made to Public Safety. This suggests that there is a difference in the means of calls made to Public Safety between Males and non-Males in this sample. Moreover, race/ethnicity also approaches significance at $p=0.082$ but is not fully significant. However, the interaction between race and gender remained non-significant. A closer look into the ANOVA results show a very clear pattern that is consistent with our hypotheses. Specifically for race/ethnicity, White/Caucasian with a p-value of 0.026 was significant and implied that the means of White/Caucasians were different from the rest. The Means Table, from Minitab, showed that the mean for White/Caucasians was much higher than the rest while the mean for all the Non-Male participants was lower than the Males.

Binary Logistic Regression

The Binary Logistic Regression Analysis also showed results consistent with the ANOVA. The results suggest that gender with a p-value of 0.007 has a statistically significant association with the response variable. The odds ratio for the significant term was also calculated and it came out to be 4.3. This implies that Males are 4.3 times more likely to call Public Safety than Non-Males. No other predictor variables (such as race/ethnicity) were significant.

Poisson Hurdle Model

As mentioned above, there was a huge number of 0's in the dataset, implying no calls to Public Safety as apparent from Figure 1:

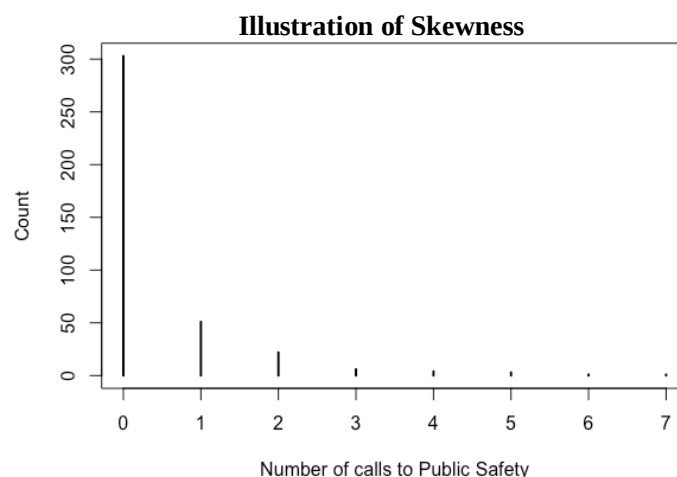


Figure 1: The over-dispersion and skewness of data

After correcting for the over-inflation of the excess zeroes (266 expected while 303 observed), the Poisson-Hurdle model showed that Gender was significant ($p=0.00562$) which suggests that there is an association between Gender and calls made to Public Safety. Nothing else was significant (not even the breakdown of races) which implies that in our previous models, which were a poor fit, could not correct the over-inflation of the zeroes in the data. Figure 2 shows the counts after correcting for over-inflation of the zeroes.

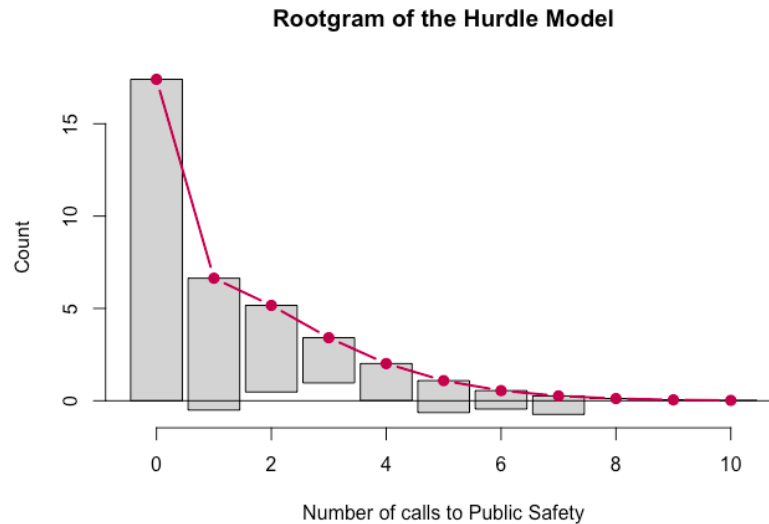


Figure 2: The hurdle-model after correcting for the over-inflation of zeroes in the data.

Conclusion & Discussion

This study aimed to look at any discrepancies that may exist in seeking Public Safety's help as a function of race/ethnicity, gender, and the interaction of the two at a College-level. The results suggest that a racial/ethnic bias towards calling Public Safety does not exist on the campus, effectively refuting both of my hypotheses. However, there is a gender bias, wherein Males are 4.3 times more likely to call Public Safety for help compared to Non-Male students, regardless of race/ethnicity. Lastly, there was no evidence of significant interaction between gender and race/ethnicity.

A major reason that this data could have deviated from previous research can be that students may have a very different outlook on the role of Public Safety on Campus, compared to the Police in the city. This could be due to the fact that Public Safety officers are currently unarmed, thus reducing the student body's fear. They are also seen around the school a lot, which in a way normalises their presence. This could lead to students seeing them as trustworthy and helpful, and not as a threat. Moreover, a lot of previous research on Police brutality is done in areas with relatively little economic growth and low education rates, which increases the chances of the Police getting away with misdemeanors. However, this is not necessarily the case in a large upstate New York college, where students are well aware of their rights and Public Safety is kept in strict check by the College.

However, it was surprising to see a gender deviation in the sentiments towards Public Safety, which could potentially be explained by the lack of female officers on-campus. Positive, same-gender role-models are excellent in fostering a sense of trust towards an organisation, and Public Safety fails to produce them (Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003). This is in line with previous research which shows that males and females have a very different experience with law enforcement, mostly because of the bureaucratic problems that exist in police stations. Non-male students may not expect cis-male Public Safety Officers to understand some of their problems thus they may opt to consult other resources, such as *RESTORE Rape Crisis*, significantly reducing calls made to Public Safety.

There were several limitations in the study. The dataset, though representative, captured only ~10% of the College's population. A bigger and randomly-sampled dataset would be excellent in elucidating this phenomenon. Since participants were self-reporting, they could also have been exaggerating the amount of times they called Public Safety to appear more responsible. Another problem in this dataset was the over-inflation of zeroes, making it non-normal, thus requiring several tests to check-and-balance the robustness of 2-way ANOVA. A future direction could be to develop a novel method to test such data. Lastly, for a future study, participants can be asked for the specific reason they called Public Safety; responses can then be coded to provide a greater depth in the data.

These are incredibly optimistic results and show that a general trend of trust can be noticed towards law enforcement on racial and ethnic lines. Although the Police force has a long way to go to cultivate trust among American minorities (non-Males and non-Whites), this study suggests that it is possible on smaller scales which can eventually build up!

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