

Times Herald crime article so far off it should be a felony -- 11/13/11 -- Schussel

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By Robert Schussel, Ph.D
11/13/11

Purpose

To point out data errors in the Vallejo Times Herald article Vallejo crime includes good, bad and ugly http://www.timesheraldonline.com/ci_19327148 written by reporter Jessica York appearing in the November 13, 2011 edition of the paper.

Background

In August 21, 2011 VIB published an article entitled An analysis of the impact of downsizing on the ability of Vallejo's police to close offenses by arrest. The VIB article covers topics similar to the 11/13/11 Times Herald article, but uses the correct data. The FBI data (Uniform Crime Reports = UCR) in the VIB article differ dramatically from what the Times Herald published. Several of the Times Herald findings are incorrect.

About three weeks ago, this writer offered to go over the raw UCR and clearance data with the Times Herald. They declined.

Caveat

The differences in methodology between the Times Herald article and the VIB article are as follows:

VIB article:

- 1) Monthly Clearance Data (1995 through 2010) was obtained from the Vallejo Police Department as part of a Public Records Act request. Crime rates were obtained from the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting website.
- 2) Because a significant amount of the data for the years 2004 and 2005 was missing a decision was made not to include any 2004 or 2005 data in the analyses.
- 3) December 1999 data was not provided.
- 4) Property crimes have relatively low clearance rates nationally such as Robbery(26%), Burglary(12%), Larceny (18%) and Motor Vehicle Theft (11%)

The Times Herald article

- 1) Used data from the Vallejo Police Department and the California Department of Justice.
- 2) The definition of Violent Crime appears to contain burglary which is defined by the FBI as a property crime.

Findings

1) With the exception of the year 2000 the Times Herald included burglaries in their violent crime data creating a confusing and inconsistent result that also does not follow definitions used by law enforcement. Both the FBI and California Department of Justice classify burglary as a property crime. The FBI UCR data is readily available online for years 1994 to 2010 while the California Department of Justice data is available from 1999 to 2009.

2) Most of the decline in cleared offenses occurred in 2008/09 when the number of sworn police officers declined from about 140 to 115. Despite statements by the Times Herald about a decade of decline in clearance rates from 2000 to 2003 the clearance rate for violent crime remained above 60%. The clearance rate for Vallejo PD is significantly better overall than the national average.

It should be noted that a decline in clearance rates from 64% to 52% occurred in 2004 even though the average number of sworn officers was about 140.

3) While Vallejo clearance rates dropped more than Fairfield, Vacaville and Richmond, no explanation was given for the declines in these other cities.

4) Total crime rates have dropped significantly (each year) from 2006 through 2010 and is at its LOWEST level in 16 years.

5) The Times Herald suggests that the dramatic decline in crime rates was due to the Police Chief selecting 1994 as his starting point. However since 1997 crime rates have been declining. (with the exception of 2006 when it increased).

6) While the Times Herald reported property crimes have increased "by nearly 68% between 2000 and 2009" the reality is that property crimes have declined from 5,773 in 2000 to 5,478 in 2009. The 68% increase reported by the Times Herald is not supported by FBI or California Department of Justice data.

7) The graph published in the Times Herald shows an increase in violent crimes from 1299 in 2000 to 2336 in 2001. However according to the FBI UCR data the 2001 number was 1,160--a difference of 1176. The discrepancy appears to

be due to the Times Herald adding of the property crime Burglary to the Violent Crime totals from 2001 through 2009.

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The Times Herald has done Police Chief Nichelini a disservice by insinuating that he skewed his report to the City Council by selecting certain dates for comparison. Until the number of sworn officers declined dramatically in the past three years the VPD had a significantly higher clearance rate for Violent Crimes compared to other cities of our size. The Times Herald also ignored the fact that an analysis of clearance rates was published by ibvallejo.com.

I would hope that in the future the Times Herald checks their data or perhaps they should stick to reporting on topics they can handle.