

Targeted Neighborhood Sampling

A New Approach for Recruiting Abusive Couples

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Researchers who study intimate partner violence often find it difficult to recruit participants. Although random sampling is the gold standard, it can be expensive and may under-sample abusive couples, because these couples tend to be concentrated among lower socio-economic groups within specific areas. Convenience samples using direct solicitations also pose problems. Some abused women do not identify as abused, and their partners are unlikely to participate if the study is said to focus on couple violence.

A third method involves soliciting participants from shelters, emergency-rooms, or intervention programs. However, this method likely over-represents couples who experience severe violence that necessitates outside involvement. Thus, targeting these sites potentially misses low- and mid-levels of interpersonal violence. For these reasons, new sampling strategies are needed to strengthen the study of intimate partner violence.

ISSR Catalyst Grant recipients F. Scott Christopher, Jacqueline C. Pflieger, Daniel J. Canary, and Laura K. Guerrero have responded to this need by conducting two studies to develop and test a new sampling strategy -- *Targeted Neighborhood Sampling*.

Targeted Neighborhood Sampling relies on police reports of domestic violence to identify neighborhoods where couple violence occurs. To locate high violence areas, researchers counted the number of households and determined the proportion of (a) the number of family fight service calls to (b) the number of households for each district. This let them identify neighborhoods with the highest rate of family fight service calls.

Next, the authors sought to determine whether a random or a convenience strategy was more effective at attracting participants to a study of couple violence. To do so, those neighborhoods with the highest percentage of family fight calls (an average of 15%) were divided into random and convenience conditions. For the random condition, the authors generated a list of addresses using systematic random sampling and approached couples in their homes. In the convenience condition, flyers were attached to the door of every household in the targeted district. In both conditions, the study was described as focusing on relationships and how couples communicate.

The convenience sampling approach was significantly more successful at recruiting violent couples, with almost 10 times more households contacted and 7.67 times more couples qualifying for the study as well as many more couples actually participating (18 versus 1). A second study replicated the findings from Study I.

The researchers also examined whether their couples recruited through Targeted Neighborhood Sampling were similar to participants recruited via other methods. To do so, they analyzed the associations between different forms of partner violence and the respondents' conflict strategies, as well as their experiences with alcohol and drug abuse, depression, and symptoms of PTSD. Using data from both studies, they found that their samples share characteristics common to other violent couples, indicating that Targeted Neighborhood Sampling is a valid and useful method for studying couple violence.

The article "Targeted Neighborhood Sampling: A New Approach for Recruiting Abusive Couples" has been accepted for publication by the *Journal of Family Violence*.

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