

Unit 9 Proposal: Neighborhood Watch Programs

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### **Neighborhood Watch Programs**

The term “home,” can have several meanings to many different people. But most people associate this word with their place of residence or where they seek refuge. Of all places, a person’s home should not be a place they fear falling victim to crime, but instead, as a place where they feel safe and secure. When a person comes home after a long day of work to discover their home has been broken into and all of their prized possessions have been stolen, it is normal to feel angry, and violated because that’s what it is, a violation. For the most part, burglaries are a crime of opportunity. A burglar can sit and watch someone’s house all day and know exactly what time they go to work and return home. According to the Texas Crime Statistics and Rates Report, in 2009 there were 240,233 burglary incidents and a total of 995,145 property crime incidents in Texas (“Texas Crime Statistics,” n.d.). Reports from 2012 are already showing an increase in these numbers compared to 2009 (“Texas crime statistics,” n.d.). This is alarming and neighborhood watch could be the solution. In 1972, the National Sheriffs’ Association founded the Neighborhood Watch Program with the intentions of helping police reduce crimes in neighborhoods (Campbell, n.d.). While the main focuses of Neighborhood Watch programs are to prevent crime, they may also educate and strengthen the community.

### **Review of Literature:**

Almost 2 years ago, residents of Salisbury, New Hampshire lost their police department when their 2-man force suddenly resigned. Since then, they have been unable to fill the empty

positions, so the state police have been providing coverage for the community. Members of the Salisbury community are now looking to create a neighborhood watch program, not to replace law enforcement, but to enhance the coverage already being supplied by the state (McCrystal, 2012). The idea of a neighborhood watch program in this community already exists, it's just not formalized. Many residents already watch for suspicious people or behavior so formalizing the program will simply give them someone to call when suspicious behavior or activity does take place. Members of the Salisbury community have great reason to push for the implementation of Neighborhood Watch programs. Not only is it believed to reduce crime, but it is also thought to bring the community together as well.

According to the St. Petersburg, FL police department, Neighborhood Crime Watch is one of the most effective and least costly ways to prevent crime and reduce fear (Uniform Services Bureau, n.d.). They strongly feel that their neighborhood watch program reduces crime and brings the department and the members of the community together. They accomplish this by holding meetings, assigning members to monitor the neighborhood (citizens' patrol), having Regular discussions between the neighbors, Crime Prevention Officers and Community Police Officers, and by holding special events to inform the public about the program and its purpose.

Burglary and vandalism are two of the main crimes that haunt all members of every community and neighborhood watch programs help deter this type of behavior. While these programs have many names, Crime Watch, Block Watch, or Community Watch, its success comes from the commitment of the police department and the members of the community to come together and fight crime. Thousands of neighborhood watch programs exist across the U.S.

because it is thought to be one of the most effective ways members of communities can reduce crime in their neighborhoods. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Policing Services led a meta-analysis of studies on neighborhood watch programs and determined that neighborhoods with watch programs had 16 percent less crime in comparison to neighborhoods without watch programs (Holloway, Bennett, & Farrington, 2008). Burglary is one of the most widespread crimes committed and it makes up more than one third of the index crimes in the United States (Uniform Crime Reports, 2013). Not only are people's residences threatened when this crime is committed, but some even lose their life by inadvertently walking in on an unsuspecting burglar. Neighborhood watch programs are designed to spot suspicious behavior; thus it is successful in preventing this type of crime. In addition, Neighborhood Watch signs and decals provided to the program from law enforcement allows them to display their existence which deters criminals from their neighborhood.

### **Problem, Theory, Variables, and Hypothesis:**

Problem Statement: Neighborhoods without watch groups may have high crime rates.

Theory: Neighborhood watch groups should decrease crime in general and burglary specifically.

Independent Variable (Cause): Watch Program

Indicator: program either exists or it doesn't.

Neighborhood Watch [ ] yes [ ] no

Dependent Variable (Outcome): Average Crime Rate

Indicator: average number of burglaries per month in 20 specific geographic areas (neighborhoods).

Hypothesis: Neighborhoods with watch programs are less likely to have burglaries than neighborhoods without watch programs.

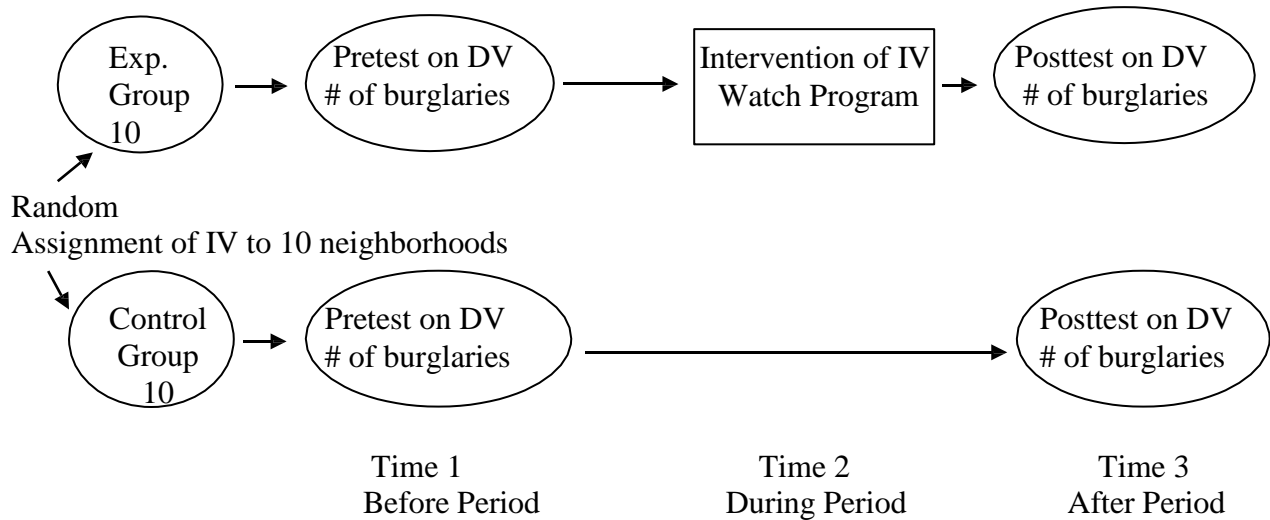
**Population / Sample:**

The population for this proposal is 53 neighborhoods in Dallas, Texas that do not have a neighborhood watch program in existence. There is a master list of these 53 neighborhoods allowing a *probability sampling strategy* to be utilized. Specifically, a *simple random sample* of 20 neighborhoods from the master list of 53 neighborhoods will be used (the neighborhood watch program will be randomly assigned to 10 neighborhoods; Thus, establishing the experimental group. The remaining 10 neighborhoods will be the control group).

**Research Design:**

True-Classic Design (see Figure 1) will be used for this proposal. The neighborhood watch program will be randomly assigned to ten neighborhoods from Dallas, Texas. The remaining ten neighborhoods in the sample will not receive the independent variable (watch program). The ten neighborhoods receiving neighborhood watch will comprise the experimental group. The remaining ten neighborhoods without neighborhood watch will comprise the control group.

Figure 1: True Classic Experimental Design



**Data Collection:**

Existing agency data and official statistics will be collected for this proposal. Police reports from local police departments and published crime statistics for the designated areas will be used to measure crime rates for the neighborhoods 6 months prior to the implementation of the watch program as well as 6 months after the watch program has been implemented.

**Research Considerations**

Police reports are valid, reliable written documents prepared by police officers after a crime or accident has occurred. Police reports usually contain the name of the victim, witnesses to the crime, the classification of the offense and other relevant information. Since police reports are public documents in most areas, limitations may be placed on the kinds of information released to the public. As long as the crime and date of the crime is listed on the report, it will be useful for this study. Another issue that may arise with this type of data is it may not be released

if the crime involved a juvenile. An ethical issue with police reports has to do with the honesty of the officer who files the report. Although there are huge consequences for falsifying police reports, it still happens. Since most crimes are typically committed in secret, crime statistic reports can be inaccurate. These reports only reflect crimes that have been reported, thus it is almost impossible to get an accurate statistic when information is missing.

### References

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