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Black Homicide Victimization in the United States

An Analysis of 2007 Homicide Data

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The Violence Policy Center (VPC) is a national non-profit educational organization that conducts research and public education on violence in America and provides information and analysis to policymakers, journalists, advocates, and the general public. This report was authored by VPC Policy Analyst Marty Langley. The study was funded in part with the support of the David Bohnett Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, and the Public Welfare Foundation. Past studies released by the VPC include:

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- *Sitting Ducks—The Threat to the Chemical and Refinery Industry from 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles* (August 2002)
- *License to Kill IV: More Guns, More Crime* (June 2002)
- *The U.S. Gun Industry and Others Unknown—Evidence Debunking the Gun Industry’s Claim that Osama bin Laden Got His 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles from the U.S. Afghan-Aid Program* (February 2002)
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- *Voting from the Rooftops: How the Gun Industry Armed Osama bin Laden, Other Foreign and Domestic Terrorists, and Common Criminals with 50 Caliber Sniper Rifles* (October 2001)
- *Hispanics and Firearms Violence* (May 2001)
- *Where’d They Get Their Guns?—An Analysis of the Firearms Used in High-Profile Shootings, 1963 to 2001* (April 2001)
- *A Deadly Myth: Women, Handguns, and Self-Defense* (January 2001)
- *Handgun Licensing and Registration: What it Can and Cannot Do* (September 2000)
- *Pocket Rockets: The Gun Industry’s Sale of Increased Killing Power* (July 2000)
- *Guns For Felons: How the NRA Works to Rearm Criminals* (March 2000)
- *One Shot, One Kill: Civilian Sales of Military Sniper Rifles* (May 1999)
- *Cease Fire: A Comprehensive Strategy to Reduce Firearms Violence* (Revised, October 1997)

Introduction

America is facing an epidemic of homicide among young black males.

According to a recent study conducted by Professor James Alan Fox of Northeastern University, one of the nation's leading criminal justice researchers, from 2002 to 2007 the number of black male juvenile homicide victims rose by 31 percent. The number of young black homicide victims killed by guns rose at an even sharper rate: 54 percent.¹

This study examines the growing problem of black homicide victimization at the state level.

The devastation homicide inflicts on black teens and adults is a national crisis, yet it is all too often ignored outside of affected communities.

This study analyzes unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR)² data for black homicide submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).³ The information used for this report is for the year 2007 and is the most recent data available. This is the first analysis of the 2007 data on black homicide victims to offer breakdowns of cases in the five states with the highest black homicide victimization rates and the first to rank the states by the rate of black homicides.

¹ "The Recent Surge in Homicides Involving Young Black Males and Guns: Time to Reinvest in Prevention and Crime Control," James Alan Fox, Ph.D., and Marc L. Swatt, Ph.D., Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, December 2008.

² In 2007 the state of Florida, as in prior years, did not submit any data to the FBI Supplementary Homicide Report. Data from Florida was not requested individually because the difference in collection techniques would create a bias in the study results.

³ The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program collects basic information on serious crimes from participating police agencies and records supplementary information about the circumstances of homicides in its unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR). Submitted monthly, supplementary data consists of: the age, sex, race, and ethnicity of both victims and offenders; the types of weapons used; the relationship of victims to offenders; and, the circumstances of the murders. According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program, supplementary data are provided on only a subset of homicide cases. Additionally, SHR data are updated throughout the year as homicide reports are forwarded by state UCR programs.

National Data

According to the FBI SHR data, in 2007 there were 7,387 black homicide victims in the United States. The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 20.86 per 100,000. For that year, the overall national homicide rate was 5.30 per 100,000. For whites, the national homicide rate was 3.11 per 100,000. Additional information contained in the FBI SHR data on black homicide includes the following.

Gender

Of the 7,387 black homicide victims, 6,345 (86 percent) were male, and 1,042 (14 percent) were female. The homicide rate for black male victims was 37.59 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for male homicide victims was 8.56 per 100,000. For white male homicide victims it was 4.63 per 100,000. The homicide rate for female black victims was 5.62 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for female homicide victims was 2.11 per 100,000. For white female homicide victims it was 1.61 per 100,000.

Age

Six hundred seventy-four black homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 150 black homicide victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 82 percent of black victims (5,743 out of 7,011) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 73 percent (4,204 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 701 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 247 victims killed by bodily force, and 200 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 72 percent of black victims (2,474 out of 3,431) were murdered by someone they knew. Nine hundred fifty-seven victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 69 percent (3,023 out of 4,362) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 55 percent (1,669 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender. Ten percent (294 homicides) were reported to be gang-related. Forty-four percent of gang-related homicides (128 homicides) were in California, which may be in part due to more comprehensive reporting. In California, 44 percent of non-felony related homicides were reported to be gang-related.

State Rankings

In 2007, the national black homicide victimization rate was 20.86 per 100,000. For that year, Pennsylvania ranked first as the state with the highest black homicide victimization rate. Its rate of 36.36 per 100,000 was more than one and a half times the national average for black homicide victims. The remaining states that comprise the top five are listed in the chart below. Additional information for each of these five states can be found in Appendix One, including: age and gender of victims; types of weapons used; relationship of victim to offender; and, the circumstances of the murders. According to the SHR data, 17 states had a black homicide victimization rate higher than the national per capita rate of 20.86 per 100,000. For an alphabetical listing of all states that submitted data to the FBI, please see the chart on pages four and five.

Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2007, Ranked by Rate

| Ranking | State | Number of Homicides | Homicide Rate per 100,000 |
|---------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Pennsylvania | 485 | 36.36 |
| 2 | Missouri | 235 | 34.82 |
| 3 | Indiana | 176 | 30.89 |
| 4 (tie) | Nevada | 61 | 29.83 |
| 4 (tie) | Wisconsin | 101 | 29.83 |

Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2007

| State Ranking by Rate | State | Number of Homicide Victims | Homicide Rate per 100,000 |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 18 | Alabama | 249 | 20.46 |
| 16 | Alaska | 6 | 21.21 |
| 12 | Arizona | 63 | 24.64 |
| 13 | Arkansas | 109 | 24.51 |
| 9 | California | 687 | 28.19 |
| 37 | Colorado | 23 | 11.21 |
| 35 | Connecticut | 45 | 12.58 |
| 32 | Delaware | 25 | 13.96 |
| | Florida | NA | NA |
| 28 | Georgia | 453 | 15.93 |
| 44 | Hawaii | 1 | 2.67 |
| 45 (tie) | Idaho | 0 | 0.00 |
| 25 | Illinois | 341 | 17.81 |
| 3 | Indiana | 176 | 30.89 |
| 24 | Iowa | 14 | 18.02 |
| 14 | Kansas | 38 | 22.57 |
| 17 | Kentucky | 68 | 20.92 |
| 6 | Louisiana | 408 | 29.40 |
| 40 | Maine | 1 | 7.66 |
| 10 | Maryland | 446 | 27.02 |
| 23 | Massachusetts | 83 | 18.43 |
| 7 | Michigan | 421 | 29.38 |
| 26 | Minnesota | 41 | 17.55 |
| 38 | Mississippi | 117 | 10.82 |
| 2 | Missouri | 235 | 34.82 |
| 45 (tie) | Montana | 0 | 0.00 |

Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2007

| State Ranking by Rate | State | Number of Homicide Victims | Homicide Rate per 100,000 |
|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 42 | Nebraska | 5 | 6.37 |
| 4 (tie) | Nevada | 61 | 29.83 |
| 41 | New Hampshire | 1 | 6.47 |
| 19 | New Jersey | 250 | 19.99 |
| 21 | New Mexico | 11 | 19.46 |
| 31 | New York | 496 | 14.79 |
| 30 | North Carolina | 293 | 15.02 |
| 45 (tie) | North Dakota | 0 | 0.00 |
| 20 | Ohio | 270 | 19.61 |
| 8 | Oklahoma | 83 | 28.97 |
| 33 | Oregon | 10 | 13.63 |
| 1 | Pennsylvania | 485 | 36.36 |
| 43 | Rhode Island | 4 | 6.03 |
| 27 | South Carolina | 204 | 16.19 |
| 36 | South Dakota | 1 | 11.43 |
| 11 | Tennessee | 255 | 24.71 |
| 22 | Texas | 529 | 18.61 |
| 39 | Utah | 3 | 9.19 |
| 45 (tie) | Vermont | 0 | 0.00 |
| 29 | Virginia | 230 | 15.03 |
| 34 | Washington | 31 | 13.09 |
| 15 | West Virginia | 14 | 22.03 |
| 4 (tie) | Wisconsin | 101 | 29.83 |
| 45 (tie) | Wyoming | 0 | 0.00 |
| | U.S. Total | 7,387 | 20.86 |

Conclusion

Blacks in the United States are disproportionately affected by homicide. For the year 2007, blacks represented 13 percent of the nation's population, yet accounted for 49 percent of all homicide victims.⁴

As noted at the beginning of this study, the devastation homicide inflicts on black teens and adults is a national crisis, yet it is all too often ignored outside of affected communities.

For blacks, like all victims of homicide, guns—usually handguns—are far and away the number one murder tool. Successful efforts to reduce America's black homicide toll must put a focus on reducing access to firearms.

⁴ FBI Supplementary Homicide Report 2007, U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

**Appendix One:
Additional Information for the Five States with the
Highest Rates of Black Homicide Victims**

Pennsylvania

There were 485 black homicide victims in Pennsylvania in 2007

*The homicide rate among black victims in Pennsylvania was
36.36 per 100,000 in 2007*

Ranked 1st in the United States

Age

Forty-two homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 10 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 485 homicide victims, 440 were male and 45 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 86 percent of victims (402 out of 467) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 87 percent (349 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 39 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 38 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 12 victims killed by bodily force, and 7 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 79 percent of victims (166 out of 210) were murdered by someone they knew. Forty-four victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 51 percent (171 out of 333) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 85 percent (145 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Missouri

There were 235 black homicide victims in Missouri in 2007

The homicide rate among black victims in Missouri was 34.82 per 100,000 in 2007

Ranked 2nd in the United States

Age

Thirty-two homicide victims (14 percent) were less than 18 years old and 4 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 235 homicide victims, 203 were male and 32 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 84 percent of victims (188 out of 223) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 34 percent (63 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 113 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 20 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 9 victims killed by bodily force, and 4 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 74 percent of victims (65 out of 88) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty-three victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 61 percent (51 out of 83) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 75 percent (38 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Indiana

There were 176 black homicide victims in Indiana in 2007

The homicide rate among black victims in Indiana was 30.89 per 100,000 in 2007

Ranked 3rd in the United States

Age

Fourteen homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 3 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 176 homicide victims, 147 were male and 29 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 85 percent of victims (145 out of 170) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 74 percent (107 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 28 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 10 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 4 victims killed by bodily force, and 8 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 78 percent of victims (64 out of 82) were murdered by someone they knew. Eighteen victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 71 percent (64 out of 90) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 78 percent (50 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Nevada

There were 61 black homicide victims in Nevada in 2007

The homicide rate among black victims in Nevada was 29.83 per 100,000 in 2007

Ranked 4th in the United States

Age

Seven homicide victims (11 percent) were less than 18 years old and 1 victim (2 percent) was 65 years of age or older. The average age was 26 years old.

Gender

Out of 61 homicide victims, 56 were male and 5 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 95 percent of victims (56 out of 59) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 75 percent (42 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 8 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There was 1 victim killed with a knife or other cutting instrument, and 1 victim killed by bodily force.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 37 percent of victims (10 out of 27) were murdered by someone they knew. Seventeen victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 45 percent (13 out of 29) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 69 percent (9 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Wisconsin

There were 101 black homicide victims in Wisconsin in 2007

The homicide rate among black victims in Wisconsin was 29.83 per 100,000 in 2007

Ranked 4th in the United States

Age

Ten homicide victims (10 percent) were less than 18 years old and 2 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 101 homicide victims, 83 were male and 18 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 81 percent of victims (80 out of 99) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 75 percent (60 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 17 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 5 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 5 victims killed by bodily force, and 2 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 51 percent of victims (25 out of 49) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty-four victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 71 percent (45 out of 63) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 60 percent (27 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

United States

There were 7,387 black homicide victims in the United States in 2007

The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 20.86 per 100,000 in 2007

Age

Six hundred seventy-four homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 150 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 7,387 homicide victims, 6,345 were male and 1,042 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 82 percent of victims (5,743 out of 7,011) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 73 percent (4,204 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 1,123 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 701 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 247 victims killed by bodily force, and 200 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 72 percent of victims (2,474 out of 3,431) were murdered by someone they knew. Nine hundred fifty-seven victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 69 percent (3,023 out of 4,362) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 55 percent (1,669 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.