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Violence Policy Center

Black Homicide Victimization in the United States

An Analysis of 2012 Homicide Data

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THE EPIDEMIC OF BLACK HOMICIDE VICTIMIZATION

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This study examines the problem of black homicide victimization at the state level by analyzing unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) data for black homicide victimization submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).¹ The information used for this report is for the year 2012 and is the most recent data available. This is the first analysis of the 2012 data on black homicide victims to offer breakdowns of cases in the 10 states with the highest black homicide victimization rates and the first to rank the states by the rate of black homicide victims.

It is important to note that the SHR data used in this report comes from law enforcement reporting at the local level. While there are coding guidelines followed by the law enforcement agencies, the amount of information submitted to the SHR system, and the interpretation that results in the information submitted (for example, gang involvement) will vary from agency to agency. While this study utilizes the best and most recent data available, it is limited by the quantity and degree of detail in the information submitted.²

NATIONAL DATA

According to the FBI SHR data, in 2012 there were 6,565 black homicide victims in the United States. The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 18.03 per 100,000. For that year, the overall national homicide rate was 4.50 per 100,000. For whites, the national homicide rate was 2.65 per 100,000. Additional information contained in the FBI SHR data on black homicide is below.

GENDER

Of the 6,565 black homicide victims, 5,708 (87 percent) were male, and 856 (13 percent) were female. The homicide rate for black male victims was 32.78 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for male homicide victims was 7.27 per 100,000. For white male homicide victims it was 3.86 per 100,000. The homicide rate for female black victims was 4.51 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for female homicide victims was 1.80 per 100,000. For white female homicide victims it was 1.45 per 100,000.

- 1 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 homicides. 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.
- 2 In 2012, as in years past, the state of Florida did not submit any data to the FBI Supplementary Homicide Report. Also in 2012, data from Alabama was not available from the FBI. Data from Florida and Alabama was not requested individually because the difference in collection techniques would create a bias in the study results. In addition, according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, limited SHR data was received from Illinois for 2012.

AGE

Four hundred seventy-five black homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 107 black homicide victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.

MOST COMMON WEAPONS

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 84 percent of black victims (5,276 out of 6,289) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 76 percent (4,015 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 574 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 203 victims killed by bodily force, and 144 victims killed by a blunt object. In comparison, 64 percent of white victims and 74 percent of victims of all races were killed with guns.

VICTIM/OFFENDER RELATIONSHIP

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 70 percent of black victims (2,075 out of 2,946) were killed by someone they knew. Eight hundred seventy-one victims were killed by strangers.

CIRCUMSTANCE

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 69 percent (2,747 out of 3,954) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 52 percent (1,427 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender, and 15 percent (420 homicides) were reported to be gang-related.

Of these gang-related homicides, 29 percent (121 homicides) were in California, which may be in part due to more comprehensive reporting. In California, 48 percent of non-felony related homicides were reported to be gang-related.

STATE RANKINGS

In 2012, the national black homicide victimization rate was 18.03 per 100,000. For that year, Missouri ranked first as the state with the highest black homicide victimization rate. Its rate of 34.98 per 100,000 was nearly double the national average for black homicide victimization. The remaining states that comprise the top 10 are listed in the following chart. Additional information for each of these 10 states can be found in Appendix One, including: age and gender of victims; most common weapons used; relationship of victim to offender; and, the circumstances of the homicides. According to the SHR data, 17 states had a black homicide victimization rate higher than the national per capita rate of 18.03 per 100,000. For an alphabetical listing of all states that submitted data to the FBI, please see Appendix Two.

NUMBER OF BLACK HOMICIDE VICTIMS AND RATES BY STATE IN 2012, RANKED BY RATE

Ranking	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
1	Missouri	247	34.98
2	Nebraska	31	34.93
3	Michigan	492	34.77
4	Pennsylvania	452	31.02
5	Louisiana	384	25.75
6	Indiana	157	25.48
7	Oklahoma	73	25.04
8	Wisconsin	91	24.38
9	California	585	23.25
10	Tennessee	246	22.40

CONCLUSION

Blacks in the United States are disproportionately affected by homicide. For the year 2012, blacks represented 13 percent of the nation's population, yet accounted for 50 percent of all homicide victims.³

The devastation homicide inflicts on black teens and adults is a national crisis that should be a top priority for policymakers to address. An important part of ending our gun violence epidemic will involve reducing homicides in the African-American community.

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, like America's homicide toll as a whole, must put a focus on reducing access and exposure to firearms.

3 FBI Supplementary Homicide Report 2012, U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

Appendix One: Additional Information for the 10 States with the Highest Rates of Black Homicide Victims

Missouri

There were 247 black homicide victims in Missouri in 2012.

The homicide rate among black victims in Missouri was 34.98 per 100,000 in 2012.

Ranked 1st in the United States

Age	Twenty-three homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 29 years old.
Gender	Out of 247 homicide victims, 207 were male and 40 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (212 out of 243) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 53 percent (113 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 92 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 15 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 5 victims killed by bodily force, and 6 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 73 percent of victims (70 out of 96) were killed by someone they knew. Twenty-six victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 58 percent (63 out of 109) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 76 percent (48 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Nebraska

There were 31 black homicide victims in Nebraska in 2012.

The homicide rate among black victims in Nebraska was 34.93 per 100,000 in 2012.

Ranked 2nd in the United States

Age	Six homicide victims (19 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 29 years old.
Gender	Out of 31 homicide victims, 26 were male and 5 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (27 out of 31) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 96 percent (26 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 2 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, and 1 victim killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 67 percent of victims (6 out of 9) were killed by someone they knew. Three victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 89 percent (17 out of 19) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 18 percent (3 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Michigan

There were 492 black homicide victims in Michigan in 2012.

The homicide rate among black victims in Michigan was 34.77 per 100,000 in 2012.

Ranked 3rd in the United States

Age	Thirty-eight homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 7 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 32 years old.
Gender	Out of 492 homicide victims, 442 were male and 50 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 89 percent of victims (429 out of 480) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 60 percent (256 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 140 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 28 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 14 victims killed by bodily force, and 5 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 68 percent of victims (108 out of 160) were killed by someone they knew. Fifty-two victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 81 percent (175 out of 217) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 45 percent (79 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Pennsylvania

There were 452 black homicide victims in Pennsylvania in 2012.

The homicide rate among black victims in Pennsylvania was 31.02 per 100,000 in 2012.

Ranked 4th in the United States

Age	Thirty-one homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 8 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 29 years old.
Gender	Out of 452 homicide victims, 408 were male and 44 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (387 out of 445) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 82 percent (317 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 61 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 32 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 8 victims killed by bodily force, and 10 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 81 percent of victims (161 out of 199) were killed by someone they knew. Thirty-eight victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 54 percent (170 out of 316) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 85 percent (145 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Louisiana

There were 384 black homicide victims in Louisiana in 2012.

The homicide rate among black victims in Louisiana was 25.75 per 100,000 in 2012.

Ranked 5th in the United States

Age	Thirty homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 6 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 29 years old.
Gender	Out of 384 homicide victims, 340 were male and 44 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (324 out of 373) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 92 percent (299 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 4 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 22 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 12 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, 82 percent of victims (113 out of 137) were killed by someone they knew. Twenty-four victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 60 percent (56 out of 94) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 77 percent (43 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Indiana

There were 157 black homicide victims in Indiana in 2012.

The homicide rate among black victims in Indiana was 25.48 per 100,000 in 2012.

Ranked 6th in the United States

Age	Nine homicide victims (6 percent) were less than 18 years old and 2 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Gender	Out of 157 homicide victims, 140 were male and 17 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 91 percent of victims (138 out of 152) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 61 percent (84 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 48 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 10 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 2 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, 78 percent of victims (54 out of 69) were killed by someone they knew. Fifteen victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 65 percent (64 out of 98) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 55 percent (35 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Oklahoma

There were 73 black homicide victims in Oklahoma in 2012.

The homicide rate among black victims in Oklahoma was 25.04 per 100,000 in 2012.

Ranked 7th in the United States

Age	Seven homicide victims (10 percent) were less than 18 years old and 1 victim (1 percent) was 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.
Gender	Out of 73 homicide victims, 57 were male and 16 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (60 out of 69) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 55 victims (92 percent) were killed with a handgun. There were 2 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 4 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments and 5 victims killed by bodily force.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 69 percent of victims (29 out of 42) were killed by someone they knew. Thirteen victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 69 percent (45 out of 65) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 31 percent (14 homicides) involved an argument between the victim and the offender.

Wisconsin

There were 91 black homicide victims in Wisconsin in 2012.

The homicide rate among black victims in Wisconsin was 24.38 per 100,000 in 2012.

Ranked 8th in the United States

Age	Six homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 1 victim (1 percent) was 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.
Gender	Out of 91 homicide victims, 84 were male and 7 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 84 percent of victims (75 out of 89) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 83 percent (62 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 12 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 10 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments and 4 victims killed by bodily force.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 63 percent of victims (27 out of 43) were killed by someone they knew. Sixteen victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 65 percent (31 out of 48) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 68 percent (21 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

California

There were 585 black homicide victims in California in 2012.

The homicide rate among black victims in California was 23.25 per 100,000 in 2012.

Ranked 9th in the United States

Age	Forty-two homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 9 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Gender	Out of 585 homicide victims, 513 were male and 72 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 84 percent of victims (482 out of 573) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 74 percent (355 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 105 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 54 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 13 victims killed by bodily force, and 18 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 54 percent of victims (144 out of 269) were killed by someone they knew. One hundred twenty-five victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 72 percent (250 out of 345) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 44 percent (111 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Tennessee

There were 246 black homicide victims in Tennessee in 2012.

The homicide rate among black victims in Tennessee was 22.40 per 100,000 in 2012.

Ranked 10th in the United States

Age	Fifteen homicide victims (6 percent) were less than 18 years old and 6 victims (3 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Gender	Out of 246 homicide victims, 211 were male, 34 were female, and 1 was of unknown gender.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 84 percent of victims (184 out of 218) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 72 percent (133 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 40 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 13 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 9 victims killed by bodily force, and 10 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 (112 out of 152) were killed by someone they knew. Forty victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 76 percent (106 out of 139) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 59 percent (63 homicides) involved an argument between the victim and the offender.

United States

There were 6,565 black homicide victims in the United States in 2012.

The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 18.03 per 100,000 in 2012.

Age	Four hundred seventy-five homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 107 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Gender	Out of 6,565 homicide victims, 5,708 were male, 856 were female, and 1 was of unknown gender.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 84 percent of victims (5,276 out of 6,289) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 76 percent (4,015 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 1,000 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 574 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 203 victims killed by bodily force, and 144 victims killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 70 percent of victims (2,075 out of 2,946) were killed by someone they knew. Eight hundred seventy-one victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 69 percent (2,747 out of 3,954) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 52 percent (1,427 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Appendix Two: Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2012

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
	Alabama	N/A	N/A
37	Alaska	3	10.96
29	Arizona	39	13.09
17	Arkansas	83	18.05
9	California	585	23.25
36	Colorado	25	11.09
27	Connecticut	53	13.20
19	Delaware	34	16.82
	Florida	N/A	N/A
28	Georgia	406	13.13
43 (tie)	Hawaii	0	0.00
43 (tie)	Idaho	0	0.00
11	Illinois	379	19.94
6	Indiana	157	25.48
26	Iowa	14	14.42
21 (tie)	Kansas	28	15.66
15	Kentucky	66	18.64
5	Louisiana	384	25.75
43 (tie)	Maine	0	0.00
18	Maryland	312	17.66
39	Massachusetts	57	10.84
3	Michigan	492	34.77
24	Minnesota	46	15.44
35	Mississippi	127	11.38
1	Missouri	247	34.98
43 (tie)	Montana	0	0.00
2	Nebraska	31	34.93
23	Nevada	38	15.54
43 (tie)	New Hampshire	0	0.00
12	New Jersey	254	19.56
21 (tie)	New Mexico	8	15.66
33	New York	429	12.53
38	North Carolina	235	10.94
40	North Dakota	1	9.48
14	Ohio	269	18.69

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
7	Oklahoma	73	25.04
32	Oregon	10	12.89
4	Pennsylvania	452	31.02
13	Rhode Island	15	19.45
20	South Carolina	208	15.73
41	South Dakota	1	7.17
10	Tennessee	246	22.40
30	Texas	420	13.06
42	Utah	2	5.45
25	Vermont	1	14.54
34	Virginia	197	12.22
31	Washington	35	13.03
16	West Virginia	12	18.24
8	Wisconsin	91	24.38
43 (tie)	Wyoming	0	0.00
U.S. Total		6,565	18.03



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