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Black Homicide Victimization in the United States

An Analysis of 2004 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 Executive Director Josh Sugarmann and Policy Analyst Marty Langley. This report was funded in part with the support of The Herb Block Foundation, The David Bohnett Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, and The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Past studies released by the VPC include:

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- *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)

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Introduction

For black teens and young adults in the United States, homicide is the leading cause of death.

According to 2004 data (the most recent available) from the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), for black teens and young adults in the age groups 15 to 19, 20 to 24, and 25 to 34, homicide is the leading cause of death. (The CDC data is the leading federal resource ranking causes of death.) For blacks aged 15 to 24, 40 percent of all deaths (2,803 of 7,049) were homicides. Eighty-nine percent of these homicides were perpetrated with a firearm.

In comparison, homicide was the third leading cause of death for whites in the age groups 15 to 19, and 20 to 24; and the fifth leading cause of death in the age group 25 to 34. For whites aged 15 to 24, 8.5 percent of all deaths (2,126 of 25,013) were homicides. Similarly, 72 percent of these homicides were committed with a firearm.

In short, the toll that homicide exacts on black teens and young adults in America, both male and female, is disproportionate, disturbing, and undeniable.

This study analyzes unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR)¹ data for black homicide submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).² The information used for this report is for the year 2004 and is the most recent data available. This is the first analysis of the 2004 data on black homicide victims to offer breakdowns of cases in the 10 states with the highest black homicide rates, and the first to rank the states by the rate of black homicides.

¹ In 2004 the state of Florida 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.

² 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. This database is a separate database from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data cited above, which is taken from certificates of death and does not include the additional information of the SHR.

National Data

According to the FBI SHR data, in 2004 there were 6,644 black homicide victims in the United States. The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 18.71 per 100,000. For that year, the overall national homicide rate was 4.86 per 100,000. For whites, the national homicide rate was 2.97 per 100,000. Additional information contained in the FBI SHR data on black homicide includes:

Gender

Of the 6,644 black homicide victims, 5,629 (85 percent) were male, and 1,012 (15 percent) were female. Gender was not recorded for 3 victims. The homicide rate for black male victims was 30.56 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for male homicide victims was 7.82 per 100,000. For white male homicide victims it was 4.47 per 100,000. The homicide rate for female black victims was 5.01 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for female homicide victims was 1.98 per 100,000. For white female homicide victims it was 1.51 per 100,000.

Age

Five hundred and fifty-three black homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 139 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, 79 percent of victims (5,032 out of 6,369) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 80 percent (4,047 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 698 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 316 victims killed by bodily force, and 212 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 (2,360 out of 3,194) were murdered by someone they knew. Eight hundred and thirty-four victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 70 percent (2,769 out of 3,977) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 60 percent (1,661 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender. Twelve percent (344 homicides) were reported to be gang-related. The bulk of these (224 homicides) were in California, which may be in part due to more comprehensive reporting.

State Rankings

In 2004, the national black homicide rate was 18.71 per 100,000. For that year, Pennsylvania ranked first as the state with the highest black homicide rate. Its rate of 29.52 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 10 are listed in the chart below. Additional information for each of these 10 states can be found in Appendix One, including: age and gender of victims; type of weapon used; relationship of victim to offender; and, the circumstances of the murder. According to the SHR data, 17 states had a black homicide rate higher than the national per capita rate of 18.71. In the top 10 states, for homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 84 percent of victims (2,407 out of 2,874) were shot and killed with guns. For an alphabetical ranking 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 2004, Ranked by Rate

| Ranking | State | Number of Homicides | Homicide Rate per 100,000 |
|---------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Pennsylvania | 398 | 29.52 |
| 2 | Louisiana | 442 | 29.48 |
| 3 | Indiana | 167 | 29.30 |
| 4 | California | 750 | 28.95 |
| 5 | Missouri | 195 | 28.63 |
| 6 | Michigan | 423 | 28.27 |
| 7 | Maryland | 406 | 24.64 |
| 8 | Minnesota | 57 | 24.45 |
| 9 | Nevada | 45 | 23.67 |
| 10 | Arizona | 48 | 21.54 |

Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2004

| State Ranking by Rate | State | Number of Homicide Victims | Homicide Rate per 100,000 |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 38 | Alabama | 147 | 12.22 |
| 33 | Alaska | 4 | 13.56 |
| 10 | Arizona | 48 | 21.54 |
| 21 | Arkansas | 79 | 17.94 |
| 4 | California | 750 | 28.95 |
| 17 | Colorado | 39 | 18.72 |
| 37 | Connecticut | 45 | 12.27 |
| 42 | Delaware | 19 | 10.94 |
| | Florida | NA | NA |
| 39 | Georgia | 318 | 11.93 |
| 47 | Hawaii | 1 | 2.71 |
| 15 | Idaho | 2 | 19.38 |
| 26 | Illinois | 336 | 17.11 |
| 3 | Indiana | 167 | 29.30 |
| 40 | Iowa | 9 | 11.75 |
| 36 | Kansas | 22 | 12.64 |
| 22 | Kentucky | 57 | 17.71 |
| 2 | Louisiana | 442 | 29.48 |
| 25 | Maine | 2 | 17.28 |
| 7 | Maryland | 406 | 24.64 |
| 29 | Massachusetts | 73 | 15.95 |
| 6 | Michigan | 423 | 28.27 |
| 8 | Minnesota | 57 | 24.45 |
| 41 | Mississippi | 119 | 11.07 |
| 5 | Missouri | 195 | 28.63 |
| 48 (tie) | Montana | 0 | 0.00 |

Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2004

| State Ranking by Rate | State | Number of Homicide Victims | Homicide Rate per 100,000 |
|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 45 | Nebraska | 4 | 4.95 |
| 9 | Nevada | 45 | 23.67 |
| 43 (tie) | New Hampshire | 1 | 6.95 |
| 18 | New Jersey | 235 | 18.20 |
| 13 | New Mexico | 10 | 19.83 |
| 32 | New York | 487 | 14.05 |
| 34 | North Carolina | 250 | 13.23 |
| 24 | North Dakota | 1 | 17.46 |
| 23 | Ohio | 247 | 17.48 |
| 11 | Oklahoma | 62 | 21.25 |
| 16 | Oregon | 15 | 19.20 |
| 1 | Pennsylvania | 398 | 29.52 |
| 43 (tie) | Rhode Island | 5 | 6.95 |
| 31 | South Carolina | 177 | 14.19 |
| 48 (tie) | South Dakota | 0 | 0.00 |
| 20 | Tennessee | 181 | 18.01 |
| 28 | Texas | 430 | 16.08 |
| 46 | Utah | 1 | 3.54 |
| 12 | Vermont | 1 | 20.89 |
| 30 | Virginia | 223 | 14.65 |
| 35 | Washington | 33 | 12.81 |
| 27 | West Virginia | 10 | 16.25 |
| 14 | Wisconsin | 67 | 19.43 |
| 19 | Wyoming | 1 | 18.17 |
| | U.S. Total | 6,644 | 18.71 |

Conclusion

Blacks in the United States are disproportionately affected by homicide. For the year 2004, blacks represented 13 percent of the nation's population, yet accounted for 47 percent of all homicide victims.³ For the age groups 15 to 19, 20 to 24, and 25 to 34, homicide represents the leading cause of death for blacks in America.

For blacks, like all victims of homicide, guns—usually handguns—are by far and away the number one murder tool. As efforts are made to reduce America's black homicide victimization toll, the unique facilitating role of firearms cannot be ignored.

As noted at the beginning of this study, the toll that homicide exacts on black teens and young adults in America, both male and female, is disproportionate, disturbing, and undeniable.

³ FBI Supplementary Homicide Report 2004, U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

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

Pennsylvania

There were 398 black homicide victims in Pennsylvania in 2004

The homicide rate among black victims in Pennsylvania was 29.52 per 100,000 in 2004

Ranked 1st in the United States

Age

Thirty-five homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 7 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 398 homicide victims, 348 were male and 50 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 86 percent of victims (335 out of 389) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 81 percent (273 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 48 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 25 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 7 victims killed by bodily force, and 9 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 (130 out of 165) were murdered by someone they knew. Thirty-five victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 51 percent (146 out of 285) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 77 percent (113 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Louisiana

There were 442 black homicide victims in Louisiana in 2004

The homicide rate among black victims in Louisiana was 29.48 per 100,000 in 2004

Ranked 2nd in the United States

Age

Twenty-seven homicide victims (6 percent) were less than 18 years old and 5 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 28 years old.

Gender

Out of 441 homicide victims, 384 were male and 57 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 85 percent of victims (371 out of 436) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 86 percent (319 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 21 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 29 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 17 victims killed by bodily force, and 12 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 83 percent of victims (196 out of 236) were murdered by someone they knew. Forty victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 59 percent (107 out of 180) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 66 percent (71 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Indiana

There were 167 black homicide victims in Indiana in 2004

The homicide rate among black victims in Indiana was 29.30 per 100,000 in 2004

Ranked 3rd in the United States

Age

Twelve homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 4 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.

Gender

Out of 167 homicide victims, 148 were male and 19 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 83 percent of victims (136 out of 163) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 74 percent (100 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 29 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 16 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 5 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, 85 percent of victims (70 out of 82) were murdered by someone they knew. Twelve victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 66 percent (63 out of 95) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 71 percent (45 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

California

There were 750 black homicide victims in California in 2004

The homicide rate among black victims in California was 28.95 per 100,000 in 2004

Ranked 4th in the United States

Age

Seventy-two homicide victims (10 percent) were less than 18 years old and 13 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 750 homicide victims, 668 were male and 82 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 83 percent of victims (614 out of 742) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 84 percent (514 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 49 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 60 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 29 victims killed by bodily force, and 20 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 57 percent of victims (219 out of 385) were murdered by someone they knew. One hundred and sixty-six victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 76 percent (470 out of 618) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 47 percent (221 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Missouri

There were 195 black homicide victims in Missouri in 2004

The homicide rate among black victims in Missouri was 28.63 per 100,000 in 2004

Ranked 5th in the United States

Age

Eighteen homicide victims (9 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 195 homicide victims, 158 were male and 37 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 86 percent of victims (161 out of 188) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 29 percent (47 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 106 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 13 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 1 victim 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, 73 percent of victims (46 out of 63) were murdered by someone they knew. Seventeen victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 49 percent (35 out of 71) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 91 percent (32 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Michigan

There were 423 black homicide victims in Michigan in 2004

The homicide rate among black victims in Michigan was 28.27 per 100,000 in 2004

Ranked 6th in the United States

Age

Thirty-four homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 11 victims (3 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 32 years old.

Gender

Out of 423 homicide victims, 369 were male and 54 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 82 percent of victims (340 out of 413) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 84 percent (284 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 25 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 34 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 15 victims killed by bodily force, and 19 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 (140 out of 190) were murdered by someone they knew. Fifty victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 78 percent (190 out of 243) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 78 percent (148 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Maryland

There were 406 black homicide victims in Maryland in 2004

The homicide rate among black victims in Maryland was 24.64 per 100,000 in 2004

Ranked 7th in the United States

Age

Forty-five homicide victims (11 percent) were less than 18 years old and 3 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 28 years old.

Gender

Out of 406 homicide victims, 366 were male and 40 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 84 percent of victims (332 out of 393) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 96 percent (318 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 4 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 36 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 14 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, 72 percent of victims (63 out of 88) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty-five victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 68 percent (73 out of 107) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 62 percent (45 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Minnesota

There were 57 black homicide victims in Minnesota in 2004

The homicide rate among black victims in Minnesota was 24.45 per 100,000 in 2004

Ranked 8th in the United States

Age

Two homicide victims (4 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 57 homicide victims, 48 were male and 9 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 80 percent of victims (45 out of 56) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 91 percent (41 victims) were killed with handguns. There was 1 victim killed with a firearm, type not stated. There were 8 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, and 3 victims killed by bodily force.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 67 percent of victims (28 out of 42) were murdered by someone they knew. Fourteen victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 67 percent (30 out of 45) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 40 percent (12 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Nevada

There were 45 black homicide victims in Nevada in 2004

The homicide rate among black victims in Nevada was 23.67 per 100,000 in 2004

Ranked 9th in the United States

Age

Two homicide victims (5 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 45 homicide victims, 39 were male and 6 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 71 percent of victims (32 out of 45) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 59 percent (19 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 9 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 3 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 4 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, 94 percent of victims (16 out of 17) were murdered by someone they knew. One victim was killed by a stranger.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 77 percent (23 out of 30) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 61 percent (14 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Arizona

There were 48 black homicide victims in Arizona in 2004

The homicide rate among black victims in Arizona was 21.54 per 100,000 in 2004

Ranked 10th in the United States

Age

Three homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 2 victims (4 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 48 homicide victims, 39 were male and 9 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (41 out of 47) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 88 percent (36 victims) were killed with handguns. There was 1 victim killed with a firearm, type not stated. There were 2 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, 63 percent of victims (19 out of 30) were murdered by someone they knew. Eleven victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 59 percent (19 out of 32) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 68 percent (13 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

United States

There were 6,644 black homicide victims in the United States in 2004

The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 18.71 per 100,000 in 2004

Age

Five hundred and fifty-three homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 139 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 6,641 homicide victims, 5,629 were male and 1,012 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 79 percent of victims (5,032 out of 6,369) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 80 percent (4,047 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 618 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 698 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 316 victims killed by bodily force, and 212 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 (2,360 out of 3,194) were murdered by someone they knew. Eight hundred and thirty-four victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 70 percent (2,769 out of 3,977) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 60 percent (1,661 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.