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Black Homicide Victimization in the United States

An Analysis of 2008 Homicide Data

January 2011

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 and The Joyce Foundation. Past studies released by the VPC include:

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- *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)

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Introduction

America faces a continuing epidemic of homicide among young black males.

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

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 growing problem of black homicide victimization at the state level.

This study analyzes unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) data for black homicide victimization submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).² The information used for this report is for the year 2008 and is the most recent data available. This is the first analysis of the 2008 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.

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.³

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 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.

³ In 2008 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.

National Data

According to the FBI SHR data, in 2008 there were 6,841 black homicide victims in the United States. The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 18.07 per 100,000. For that year, the overall national homicide rate was 4.93 per 100,000. For whites, the national homicide rate was 2.99 per 100,000. Additional information contained in the FBI SHR data on black homicide includes the following.

Gender

Of the 6,841 black homicide victims, 5,878 (86 percent) were male, and 961 (14 percent) were female. In two cases, the gender of the victim was unknown. The homicide rate for black male victims was 32.49 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for male homicide victims was 7.93 per 100,000. For white male homicide victims it was 4.44 per 100,000. The homicide rate for female black victims was 4.86 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for female homicide victims was 1.99 per 100,000. For white female homicide victims it was 1.57 per 100,000.

Age

Six hundred sixteen black homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 120 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 (5,308 out of 6,445) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 72 percent (3,843 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 653 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 248 victims killed by bodily force, and 150 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 75 percent of black victims (2,398 out of 3,206) were murdered by someone they knew. Eight hundred eight victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 71 percent (2,892 out of 4,099) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 56

percent (1,608 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender. Eleven percent (330 homicides) were reported to be gang-related. Thirty-five percent of gang-related homicides (116 homicides) were in California, which may be in part due to more comprehensive reporting. In California, 46 percent of non-felony related homicides were reported to be gang-related.

State Rankings

In 2008, the national black homicide victimization rate was 18.07 per 100,000. For that year, Missouri ranked first as the state with the highest black homicide victimization rate. Its rate of 39.90 per 100,000 was more than double 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; most common 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 18.07 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 2008, Ranked by Rate
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Ranking	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
1	Missouri	287	39.90
2	Pennsylvania	449	31.05
3	Indiana	178	28.71
4	Michigan	366	24.50
5	Tennessee	244	22.59

Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2008

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicide Victims	Homicide Rate per 100,000
15	Alabama	228	18.22
39	Alaska	3	8.48
10	Arizona	64	20.11
20	Arkansas	79	16.97
7	California	585	21.59
36	Colorado	26	10.49
23	Connecticut	63	16.08
13	Delaware	36	18.73
	Florida	NA	NA
27	Georgia	437	14.66
41	Hawaii	3	6.00
42	Idaho	1	5.13
12	Illinois	376	18.83
3	Indiana	178	28.71
18	Iowa	17	17.44
14	Kansas	36	18.61
26	Kentucky	54	15.12
11	Louisiana	284	19.61
24	Maine	3	15.82
6	Maryland	381	22.06
28	Massachusetts	73	14.21
4	Michigan	366	24.50
19	Minnesota	48	17.01
34	Mississippi	132	11.95
1	Missouri	287	39.90
45 (tie)	Montana	0	0.00

Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2008

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicide Victims	Homicide Rate per 100,000
45 (tie)	Nebraska	0	0.00
8	Nevada	50	21.11
43	New Hampshire	1	4.49
17	New Jersey	239	18.11
38	New Mexico	6	8.57
30	New York	492	13.96
31	North Carolina	278	13.53
45 (tie)	North Dakota	0	0.00
16	Ohio	269	18.20
9	Oklahoma	67	20.96
37	Oregon	9	9.14
2	Pennsylvania	449	31.05
35	Rhode Island	9	11.66
29	South Carolina	183	14.04
22	South Dakota	2	16.48
5	Tennessee	244	22.59
25	Texas	473	15.57
44	Utah	1	2.14
45 (tie)	Vermont	0	0.00
33	Virginia	199	12.29
32	Washington	41	13.25
40	West Virginia	6	8.18
21	Wisconsin	63	16.76
45 (tie)	Wyoming	0	0.00
	U.S. Total	6,841	18.07

Conclusion

Blacks in the United States are disproportionately affected by homicide. For the year 2008, blacks represented 13 percent of the nation's population, yet accounted for 48 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 and exposure to firearms.

⁴ FBI Supplementary Homicide Report 2008, U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

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

Missouri

There were 287 black homicide victims in Missouri in 2008

*The homicide rate among black victims in Missouri was
39.90 per 100,000 in 2008*

Ranked 1st in the United States

Age

Twenty-eight homicide victims (10 percent) were less than 18 years old and 6 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.

Gender

Out of 287 homicide victims, 246 were male and 41 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (237 out of 273) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 50 percent (118 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 108 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 21 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 3 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, 78 percent of victims (77 out of 99) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty-two victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 55 percent (62 out of 113) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 81 percent (50 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Pennsylvania

There were 449 black homicide victims in Pennsylvania in 2008

*The homicide rate among black victims in Pennsylvania was
31.05 per 100,000 in 2008*

Ranked 2nd in the United States

Age

Thirty 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 449 homicide victims, 402 were male and 47 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 89 percent of victims (386 out of 436) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 78 percent (302 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 69 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 28 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 13 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, 84 percent of victims (178 out of 212) were murdered by someone they knew. Thirty-four victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 57 percent (180 out of 318) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 88 percent (159 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Indiana

There were 178 black homicide victims in Indiana in 2008

*The homicide rate among black victims in Indiana was
28.71 per 100,000 in 2008*

Ranked 3rd in the United States

Age

Seventeen homicide victims (10 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 178 homicide victims, 154 were male and 24 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 84 percent of victims (147 out of 175) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 64 percent (94 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 41 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 15 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 7 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, 88 percent of victims (57 out of 65) were murdered by someone they knew. Eight victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 68 percent (66 out of 97) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 64 percent (42 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Michigan

There were 366 black homicide victims in Michigan in 2008

*The homicide rate among black victims in Michigan was
24.50 per 100,000 in 2008*

Ranked 4th in the United States

Age

Thirty-one 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 31 years old.

Gender

Out of 366 homicide victims, 331 were male and 35 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (285 out of 328) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 42 percent (119 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 146 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 20 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 (67 out of 82) were murdered by someone they knew. Fifteen victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 87 percent (122 out of 140) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 47 percent (57 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Tennessee

There were 244 black homicide victims in Tennessee in 2008

*The homicide rate among black victims in Tennessee was
22.59 per 100,000 in 2008*

Ranked 5th in the United States

Age

Twenty-three homicide victims (10 percent) were less than 18 years old and 8 victims (3 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 32 years old.

Gender

Out of 244 homicide victims, 202 were male and 42 were female.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 78 percent of victims (153 out of 196) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 77 percent (118 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 27 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 21 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 13 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, 79 percent of victims (140 out of 178) were murdered by someone they knew. Thirty-eight victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 78 percent (110 out of 141) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 65 percent (71 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

United States

There were 6,841 black homicide victims in the United States in 2008

*The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was
18.07 per 100,000 in 2008*

Age

Six hundred sixteen homicide victims (9 percent) were less than 18 years old and 120 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.

Gender

Out of 6,841 homicide victims, 5,878 were male and 961 were female. In 2 cases, the gender of the victim was unknown.

Most Common Weapons

For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 82 percent of victims (5,308 out of 6,445) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 72 percent (3,843 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 1,170 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 653 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 248 victims killed by bodily force, and 150 victims killed by a blunt object.

Victim/Offender Relationship

For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 75 percent of victims (2,398 out of 3,206) were murdered by someone they knew. Eight hundred eight victims were killed by strangers.

Circumstance

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 71 percent (2,892 out of 4,099) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 56 percent (1,608 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.