



Characteristics of Homicide:

Data from California’s Electronic Violent Death Reporting System (CalEVDRS)

Homicide – the death of one person at the hands of another – extracts a great personal and social toll. A recent study estimated society’s costs at over \$17 million per murder.¹ Much of this cost is based on lost productivity, as most homicide victims are under age 30.² California clearly has a great stake in policies capable of preventing violent death.

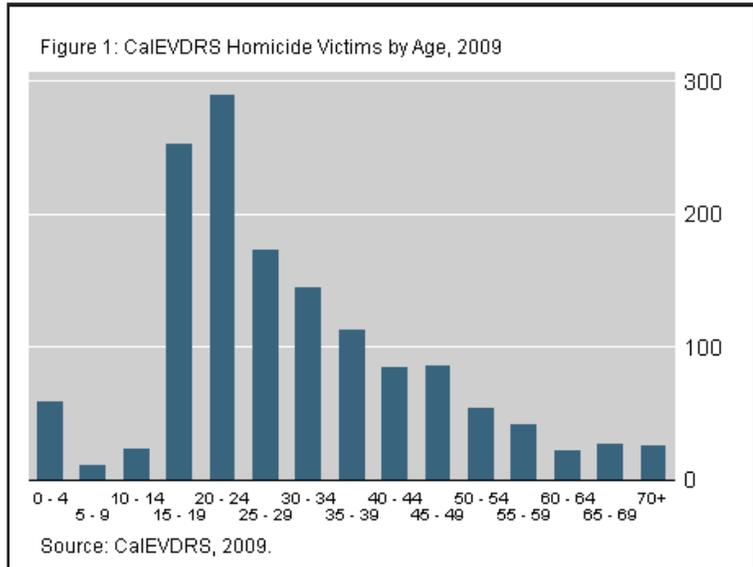
Effective policies, in turn, depend on accurate, detailed, and timely data. This brief describes homicides using data from California’s Electronic Violent Death Reporting System (CalEVDRS). CalEVDRS combines information from death certificates, police investigations, and coroner files. The 14 counties currently participating in CalEVDRS represented 58 percent of California’s 2009 population and an average of 68 percent of its annual homicides.

Of the 1,404 CalEVDRS homicides in 2009, 1,239 (88%) were single victim homicides, 136 (10%) arose from multiple victim incidents (where the suspect did not kill himself), and 29 (2%) were part of homicide-suicide incidents.

HOMICIDE VICTIMS

Homicide victims were disproportionately teenage and young adult males.

Almost four in ten homicide victims (542) were between 15 and 24 years of age (Figure 1), and 86 percent of these were male. In homicide-suicide incidents, 11 of the 29 (38%) victims were under age 18, and females accounted for 23 of 29 (79%) of these victims.



HOMICIDE CIRCUMSTANCES

Homicides, especially those involving Black or Hispanic victims, were disproportionately gang-related or involved a firearm.

Information is not always available on homicide circumstances. At least one circumstance was known/coded for 1,083 (77%) of CalEVDRS homicides in 2009. For these homicides:

Almost half (532) were documented to be gang-related or drive-by shootings. Black (58%) and Hispanic (57%) victim homicides were more likely gang-related, compared to Asian/Pacific Islander (13%) and White (13%) victim homicides.

One in six homicides was precipitated by another crime, such as robbery. Asian/Pacific Islander (30%) and White (26%) victims were more likely to be killed as a result of a crime, compared to Hispanics and Blacks (15% each).

Four in ten women were coded as victims

of intimate partner violence. Homicides of Black women (24%) were less likely to be coded as such than homicides of Hispanic (45%), White (41%), and Asian/Pacific Islander (33%) women.

Firearms were the most commonly used weapon in all homicides (72%). Handguns were used in 92 percent of all firearm homicides. Black homicide victims were most likely to be killed by a firearm (85%), followed by Hispanics (72%), Asian/Pacific Islander (65%), and Whites (50%). Other common weapons were sharp instruments (13%), blunt instruments (5%), and “personal weapons” – (hands/feet 4%).

Drugs and Alcohol

Alcohol was the most common drug found in homicide victims, with at least 34 percent testing positive. The next most common drugs were marijuana (24%) and amphetamines (6%).

YOUTH HOMICIDES

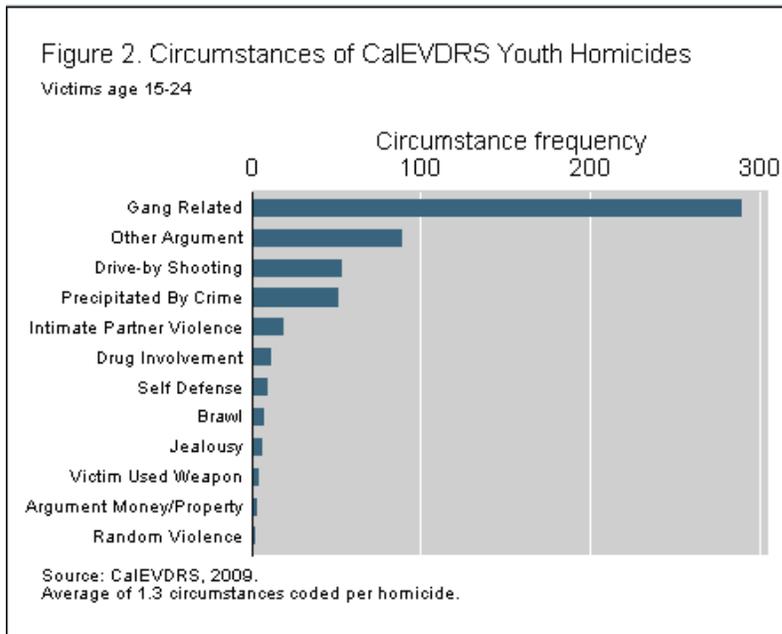
Youth homicides were even more likely to be gang-related or involve a firearm.

Some information was known and at least one circumstance was coded for 439 (81%) of the 542 homicides where the victim was between the ages of 15 and 24. For these homicides:

Seven in ten youth homicides were coded as gang-related or drive-by shootings (Figure 2).

Firearms were used in 87 percent of youth homicides and handguns were used in 92 percent of all firearm youth homicides.

More than a third of youth victims tested



positive for marijuana (36%), 28 percent tested positive for alcohol, and five percent tested positive for amphetamines.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

CalEVDERS is a partnership between the California Department of Public Health and the California Research Bureau, mostly funded by The California Wellness Foundation. CalEVDERS data can be accessed online at EpiCenter, CDPH’s online query web site for California injury data (<http://epicenter.cdph.ca.gov>). For more information about CalEVDERS, please contact SAC@cdph.ca.gov.

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ENDNOTES

1 Delisi, Matt, et al. Murder by numbers: monetary costs imposed by a sample of homicide offenders. The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology Vol. 21, No. 4, August 2010, 501-513. <http://www.soc.iastate.edu/staff/delisi/murder%20by%20numbers.pdf>

2 “Epicenter – California Injury Data Online,” California Department of Public Health, accessed 8/19/2011, <http://epicenter.cdph.ca.gov/ReportMenus/CustomTables.aspx>.