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Violence Policy Center

Black Homicide Victimization in the United States

An Analysis of 2015 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This study examines the problem of black homicide victimization at the state level by analyzing unpublished Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) data for black homicide victimization submitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).¹ The information used for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 2015 and is the most recent data available. This is the first analysis of the 2015 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 2015 there were 7,014 black homicide victims in the United States. The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 18.68 per 100,000. For that year, the overall national homicide rate was 4.62 per 100,000. For whites, the national homicide rate was 2.67 per 100,000. Additional information contained in the FBI SHR data on black homicide victimization is below.

GENDER

Of the 7,014 black homicide victims, 6,152 (88 percent) were male, and 862 (12 percent) were female. The homicide rate for black male victims was 34.21 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for male homicide victims was 7.52 per 100,000. For white male homicide victims it was 3.90 per 100,000. The homicide rate for female black victims was 4.41 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall rate for female homicide victims was 1.79 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 2015, as in years past, the state of Florida did not submit any data to the FBI Supplementary Homicide Report. Also in 2015, 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, Chicago and Rockford were the only two reporting agencies in Illinois to submit SHR data to the FBI for 2015. Beginning in 2016, all Illinois law enforcement agencies will be required by state law to report SHR data to the FBI.

AGE

Four hundred sixty-six black homicide victims (seven percent) were less than 18 years old and 122 black homicide victims (two 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, 86 percent of black victims (5,756 out of 6,716) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 71 percent (4,062 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 559 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 206 victims killed by bodily force, and 106 victims killed by a blunt object. In comparison, 66 percent of white victims and 76 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, 75 percent of black victims (2,211 out of 2,933) were killed by someone they knew. Seven hundred twenty-two victims were killed by strangers.

CIRCUMSTANCE

For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 70 percent (2,829 out of 4,033) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 51 percent (1,432 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender, and 16 percent (455 homicides) were reported to be gang-related.

Of these gang-related homicides, 25 percent (115 homicides) were in California, which may be in part due to more comprehensive reporting. In California, 50 percent of non-felony related homicides of black victims were reported to be gang-related.

There were 121 incidents reported as justifiable homicides of black victims killed by law enforcement in 2015. The SHR does not specifically identify killings by law enforcement that are not ruled justifiable. In the wake of controversial incidents of black citizens killed by law enforcement, media reports have focused on the lack of reliable statistics on lethal incidents involving law enforcement. In December 2015, the FBI announced that it would dramatically expand its data collection on violent police encounters by 2017.³ In October 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice outlined a plan to improve the collection of law enforcement use of force data.⁴

STATE RANKINGS

In 2015, the national black homicide victimization rate was 18.68 per 100,000. For that year, Missouri ranked first as the state with the highest black homicide victimization rate. Its rate of 46.24 per 100,000 was more than double the national average for black homicide victimization. The 10 states with the highest black homicide victimization rates are listed in the following chart. Additional information for each of these 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, 23 states had a black homicide victimization rate higher than the national per capita rate of 18.68 per 100,000.

For an alphabetical listing of all states that submitted data to the FBI, please see Appendix Two.

3 "FBI to sharply expand system for tracking fatal police shootings," *The Washington Post*, December 8, 2015.

4 "Justice Department Outlines Plan to Enable Nationwide Collection of Use of Force Data," Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, October 13, 2016 (<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-outlines-plan-enable-nationwide-collection-use-force-data>).

NUMBER OF BLACK HOMICIDE VICTIMS AND RATES BY STATE IN 2015, RANKED BY RATE

Ranking	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
1	Missouri	332	46.24
2	Wisconsin	140	36.77
3	Oklahoma	91	30.10
4	Alaska	8	29.22
5	Nebraska	27	28.93
6	Michigan	388	27.56
7	Pennsylvania	405	27.04
8	Indiana	168	26.44
9	Kansas	45	25.02
10	West Virginia	16	24.32

CONCLUSION

Blacks in the United States are disproportionately affected by homicide. For the year 2015, blacks represented 13 percent of the nation’s population, yet accounted for 51 percent of all homicide victims.⁵

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 nation’s gun violence epidemic will involve reducing homicides impacting black men, women, boys, and girls.

In addition, individuals living in communities where violence is prevalent are at increased risk for a broad range of negative health and behavior outcomes. An increased understanding of how trauma resulting from community violence influences development, health, and behavior can lead to improvements in the way many social services are delivered as well as policy changes at the local and federal levels.⁶

For black victims of homicide, 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.

5 FBI Supplementary Homicide Report 2015, U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

6 For more information on trauma and community violence, see the July 2017 Violence Policy Center study *The Relationship Between Community Violence and Trauma: How Violence Affects Learning, Health, and Behavior* (<http://www.vpc.org/studies/trauma17.pdf>)

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

Missouri

There were 332 black homicide victims in Missouri in 2015.

The homicide rate among black victims in Missouri was 46.24 per 100,000 in 2015.

Ranked 1st in the United States

Age	Twenty-one homicide victims (6 percent) were less than 18 years old and 4 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 29 years old.
Gender	Out of 332 homicide victims, 295 were male and 37 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 93 percent of victims (301 out of 325) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 52 percent (158 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 136 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 11 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 5 victims killed by bodily force, and 3 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 (82 out of 104) were killed by someone they knew. Twenty-two victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 52 percent (66 out of 128) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 85 percent (56 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Wisconsin

There were 140 black homicide victims in Wisconsin in 2015.

The homicide rate among black victims in Wisconsin was 36.77 per 100,000 in 2015.

Ranked 2nd in the United States

Age	Eleven homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old and 1 victim (1 percent) was 65 years of age or older. The average age was 29 years old.
Gender	Out of 140 homicide victims, 121 were male and 19 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 85 percent of victims (117 out of 137) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 75 percent (88 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 29 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 12 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 5 victims killed by bodily force, and 1 victim killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 56 percent of victims (40 out of 71) were killed by someone they knew. Thirty-one victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 82 percent (58 out of 71) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 66 percent (38 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Oklahoma

There were 91 black homicide victims in Oklahoma in 2015.

The homicide rate among black victims in Oklahoma was 30.10 per 100,000 in 2015.

Ranked 3rd in the United States

Age	Seven homicide victims (8 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 30 years old.
Gender	Out of 91 homicide victims, 79 were male and 12 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 78 percent of victims (68 out of 87) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 82 percent (56 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 6 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 9 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 7 victims killed by bodily force, and 1 victim killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 73 percent of victims (49 out of 67) were killed by someone they knew. Eighteen victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 74 percent (56 out of 76) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 48 percent (27 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Alaska

There were 8 black homicide victims in Alaska in 2015.

The homicide rate among black victims in Alaska was 29.22 per 100,000 in 2015.

Ranked 4th in the United States

Age	One homicide victim (13 percent) was less than 18 years old. The average age was 30 years old.
Gender	Out of 8 homicide victims, 5 were male and 3 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 88 percent of victims (7 out of 8) were shot and killed with guns. There were 7 victims killed with firearms, type not stated.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 100 percent of victims (5 out of 5) were killed by someone they knew.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 33 percent (2 out of 6) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 50 percent (1 homicide) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Nebraska

There were 27 black homicide victims in Nebraska in 2015.

The homicide rate among black victims in Nebraska was 28.93 per 100,000 in 2015.

Ranked 5th in the United States

Age	The average age was 33 years old.
Gender	Out of 27 homicide victims, 25 were male and 2 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 93 percent of victims (25 out of 27) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 96 percent (24 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 2 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 91 percent of victims (10 out of 11) were killed by someone they knew. One victim was killed by a stranger.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 74 percent (17 out of 23) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 6 percent (1 homicide) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Michigan

There were 388 black homicide victims in Michigan in 2015.

The homicide rate among black victims in Michigan was 27.56 per 100,000 in 2015.

Ranked 6th in the United States

Age	Twenty-two homicide victims (6 percent) were less than 18 years old and 8 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 33 years old.
Gender	Out of 388 homicide victims, 345 were male and 43 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 87 percent of victims (320 out of 369) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 41 percent (130 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 177 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 26 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 9 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, 80 percent of victims (71 out of 89) were killed by someone they knew. Eighteen victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 85 percent (117 out of 138) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 51 percent (60 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Pennsylvania

There were 405 black homicide victims in Pennsylvania in 2015.

The homicide rate among black victims in Pennsylvania was 27.04 per 100,000 in 2015.

Ranked 7th in the United States

Age	Twenty-eight homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 4 victims (1 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 30 years old.
Gender	Out of 405 homicide victims, 373 were male and 32 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 91 percent of victims (351 out of 387) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 82 percent (288 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, 9 victims killed by bodily force, and 1 victim killed by a blunt object.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 83 percent of victims (122 out of 147) were killed by someone they knew. Twenty-five victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 48 percent (148 out of 307) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 77 percent (114 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Indiana

There were 168 black homicide victims in Indiana in 2015.

The homicide rate among black victims in Indiana was 26.44 per 100,000 in 2015.

Ranked 8th in the United States

Age	Seventeen homicide victims (10 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 168 homicide victims, 143 were male and 25 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 92 percent of victims (152 out of 166) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 73 percent (111 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 34 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 5 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 3 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 (66 out of 78) were killed by someone they knew. Twelve victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 64 percent (77 out of 120) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 49 percent (38 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Kansas

There were 45 black homicide victims in Kansas in 2015.

The homicide rate among black victims in Kansas was 25.02 per 100,000 in 2015.

Ranked 9th in the United States

Age	Six homicide victims (14 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 27 years old.
Gender	Out of 45 homicide victims, 33 were male and 12 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 82 percent of victims (37 out of 45) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 57 percent (21 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 13 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 2 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments and 6 victims killed by bodily force.
Victim/Offender Relationship	For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 91 percent of victims (21 out of 23) were killed by someone they knew. Two victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 91 percent (20 out of 22) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 45 percent (9 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

West Virginia

There were 16 black homicide victims in West Virginia in 2015.

The homicide rate among black victims in West Virginia was 24.32 per 100,000 in 2015.

Ranked 10th in the United States

Age	Three homicide victims (19 percent) were less than 18 years old. The average age was 24 years old.
Gender	Out of 16 homicide victims, 14 were male and 2 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 85 percent of victims (11 out of 13) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 73 percent (8 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 3 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, 85 percent of victims (11 out of 13) were killed by someone they knew. Two victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 75 percent (6 out of 8) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 50 percent (3 homicides) involved an argument between the victim and the offender.

United States

There were 7,014 black homicide victims in the United States in 2015.

The homicide rate among black victims in the United States was 18.68 per 100,000 in 2015.

Age	Four hundred sixty-six homicide victims (7 percent) were less than 18 years old and 122 victims (2 percent) were 65 years of age or older. The average age was 31 years old.
Gender	Out of 7,014 homicide victims, 6,152 were male and 862 were female.
Most Common Weapons	For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 86 percent of victims (5,756 out of 6,716) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 71 percent (4,062 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 1,429 victims killed with firearms, type not stated. There were 559 victims killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 206 victims killed by bodily force, and 106 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 (2,211 out of 2,933) were killed by someone they knew. Seven hundred twenty-two victims were killed by strangers.
Circumstance	For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 70 percent (2,829 out of 4,033) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 51 percent (1,432 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

Appendix Two: Number of Black Homicide Victims and Rates by State in 2015

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
	Alabama	N/A	N/A
4	Alaska	8	29.22
28	Arizona	53	16.21
22	Arkansas	89	19.09
15	California	549	21.64
20	Colorado	50	20.56
38	Connecticut	51	12.25
14	Delaware	47	22.18
	Florida	N/A	N/A
33	Georgia	439	13.52
44	Hawaii	2	6.68
43	Idaho	1	7.38
18	Illinois ⁷	394	20.88
8	Indiana	168	26.44
16	Iowa	24	21.63
9	Kansas	45	25.02
13	Kentucky	83	22.80
11	Louisiana	360	23.71
47 (tie)	Maine	1	5.13
17	Maryland	389	21.24
41	Massachusetts	58	10.08
6	Michigan	388	27.56
23	Minnesota	63	18.92
40	Mississippi	118	10.49
1	Missouri	332	46.24
26	Montana	1	17.24
5	Nebraska	27	28.93
21	Nevada	55	20.42
47 (tie)	New Hampshire	1	5.13
24	New Jersey	242	18.19
25	New Mexico	9	17.44

⁷ Chicago and Rockford were the only two reporting agencies in Illinois to submit SHR data to the FBI for 2015. Beginning in 2016, all Illinois law enforcement agencies will be required by state law to report SHR data to the FBI.

State Ranking by Rate	State	Number of Homicides	Homicide Rate per 100,000
34	North Carolina	299	13.43
30	North Dakota	3	15.21
19	Ohio	304	20.57
3	Oklahoma	91	30.10
46	Oregon	5	5.98
7	Pennsylvania	405	27.04
31	Rhode Island	12	14.33
27	South Carolina	231	17.08
45	South Dakota	1	6.14
12	Tennessee	265	23.50
29	Texas	530	15.43
42	Utah	3	7.57
37	Vermont	1	12.62
32	Virginia	226	13.68
35	Washington	39	13.34
10	West Virginia	16	24.32
2	Wisconsin	140	36.77
36	Wyoming	1	12.86
U.S. Total		7,014	18.68



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