

AGE, GENDER, AND RACE RELATED TO RISK OF BEING A VICTIM OF HOMICIDE

As the Regional Clearinghouse for crime data, the Criminal Justice Research Division (CJRD) of SANDAG tracks seven major violent and property crimes on an annual and mid-year basis. Because homicide is the most serious of all crimes, CJRD also takes a closer look at the homicide victims and the precipitating event leading to their homicide. Additionally, because of an increase in homicides during the first half of 2011 (51) compared to first half of 2010 (31), motives for 2011 homicides are examined.

San Diego County's homicides, which peaked in 1991 (278), were at a 30-year low in 2010 (67), an 11 percent decrease from 2009 (75). As Table 1 shows, males (70%), Hispanics and Blacks (37% and 15%, respectively), and individuals 18 to 29 years old were more likely to be a homicide victim, given their proportion in the general population.

Table 1
RACE, GENDER, AND AGE ARE RELATED TO HOMICIDE VICTIMIZATION

Homicide Victim Characteristics	Percent of 2010 Homicide Victims	Percent of the Population
Male	70%	50%
White	30%	49%
Black	15%	5%
Hispanic	37%	31%
Other	18%	15%
Under 18 years old	14%	24%
18 to 24 years old	24%	12%
25 to 29 years old	11%	7%
30 to 39 years old	14%	14%
40 and older	38%	43%
TOTAL	66	3,224,432

NOTE: One case with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; Local law enforcement agencies

In addition to victim characteristics, identifying homicide motive can provide a clearer understanding of what contributed to victimization, and in this case, what accounted for the jump in homicides during the first half of 2011. As Table 2 shows, while the top three motives were the same between 2010 and the first half of 2011, the actual proportion varied. That is, in 2010 arguments were the most common (37%) precipitating event, followed by gang and domestic violence (18% each). However, gang violence was responsible for nearly one-quarter (24%) of the homicides in the first half of 2011 and child abuse accounted for three times as many homicides (15% versus 5%) relative to 2010.

Table 2
GANG AND CHILD ABUSE MOTIVATED HOMICIDES INCREASE IN FIRST HALF OF 2011

Motive	January - December	January – June
	2010	2011
Argument	37%	20%
Gang	18%	24%
Domestic Violence	18%	17%
Money/Financial	7%	5%
Child Abuse	5%	15%
Robbery	5%	5%
Drug	4%	0%
Lover's Triangle	4%	7%
Other	6%	7%
TOTAL	57	41

NOTE: Homicide cases without information on the precipitating event are not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG; Local law enforcement agencies, and Population and Housing Estimate, 2010

According to local law enforcement, contributing to the increase in gang homicides was a “gang war” involving close range retaliator shootings, which resulted in four gang-related homicides in the City of San Diego in April. This perspective is supported by the fact that half of the (51%) of the homicides in the first part of 2011 involved a firearm compared to 41 percent in 2010 (not shown). San Diego Police Department’s resources were promptly realigned to saturate the “hot spot” areas and several community activities occurred in an effort to restore peace in the affected communities. There have been no further gang-motivated homicides in the area since April.

Analysis of characteristics and motives together revealed some additional victimization patterns. Traditionally, Hispanic and Black youth are at greater risk for victimization, especially males, which is evident among the homicide victims in San Diego in 2010 and so far in 2011. Specifically, approximately half (46% in 2010 and 60% in 2011) of Hispanic victims were under the age of 25 and half (50% in 2010) to almost two-thirds (62% in 2011) of Black victims were under the age of 30. Contributing to this pattern is the fact that in general males are more often murdered as a result of an argument or by a stranger compared to females who are more likely to be victimized by a family member or intimate partner. In San Diego, the majority of females, both young and old, were murdered by someone they had a relationship with (e.g., boyfriend, parent) (72% in 2010 and 81% in 2011), whereas males were more likely to be a homicide victim because of altercations or their association with gangs (79% and 82%, respectively) (not shown).

While not true for all victims, these two patterns call for very different types of prevention services, interventions, and policies to help reduce the risk of violence that leads to loss of a human life.