



SANDAG

CRIMINAL JUSTICE
BRIEF

San Diego Crime Victims and Suspects in 2019



JUNE 2020

Research findings from the Criminal Justice Clearinghouse

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As of June 23, 2020

Introduction

SANDAG recently released its [Forty Years of Crime in the San Diego Region: 1980 through 2019](#), which showed a 40-year low in the property crime rate and the fourth lowest violent crime rate in 2019. However, an examination of crime in a community is incomplete without information about the victims and suspects involved. This SANDAG CJ In Brief, which is part of the SANDAG crime reports, is intended to provide a broad picture of victims affected by violent and property crime in the San Diego region. Victim and suspect characteristics are analyzed by crime type, with a focus on which subgroups of the region's population were more at risk for victimization. Data were compiled from the Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS) and local law enforcement agencies (for homicide data) to describe the characteristics of individuals who reported being a victim of a Part I violent crime (homicide, rape, robbery, or aggravated assault) and property crime (burglary, larceny, or motor vehicle theft) in 2019. Suspect data that were gathered at the time of the crime incident and prior to any litigation are also presented.

In total, data are presented for 11,962 violent and 46,247 property crime victims, along with 13,349 violent and 28,705 property crime suspects. When examining the data, it is important to remember that only about 2 in 5 (43%) violent crimes and 1 in 3 (34%) property crimes get reported and this rate varies by crime type, with 1 in 4 sexual assault crimes registering the lowest reporting rate (25%).¹ Reasons for not reporting vary and include fear of retaliation or getting the offender in trouble, dealing with the crime another way, not viewing the crime as important enough to report, and lack of confidence the police would or could help.² The fact that most crimes go unreported raises serious questions regarding what steps can and should be taken to increase the rate of reporting and subsequently improve supports and resources to victims. It was this staggering low percentage of crime reporting that precipitated the Office of Victim Services (OVC) to create *Vision 21: Transforming Victim Services* in 2013 to strategically change how victims are treated in the United States. *Vision 21* sought to better understand the barriers to reporting; lift the voices of those populations historically underserved, invisible, and/or lacking access to services (e.g., men of color, LGBTQ victims, victims with disabilities, undocumented immigrants, trafficked victims); and identify best practices in victim services.³

Why knowing who crime victims are is important

While only about 2 in 5 violent crime victims report the offense, the impact can have lasting effects and many victims never receive the entitled support to address these impacts. More than two-thirds of victims of serious violent crimes endure severe social or emotional problems, but only 12% of those victims experiencing these problems received victim services.⁴

¹ Morgan, R. & Oudekerk, B. (2018). *Criminal Victimization, 2018*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Justice Program, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available online at bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv18.pdf

² Langston, L., Berzofsky, M., Krebs, C., & Smiley-McDonald, H. (2012). *Victimizations Not Reported to the Police, 2006-2010*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Justice Program, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available online at bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/vnrp0610.pdf

³ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Victims of Crime. (May 2013). *Vision 21 Transforming Victim Services, Final Report*. Washington, D.C.: Author. Available online at ovc.ncjrs.gov/vision21/pdfs/Vision21_Report.pdf

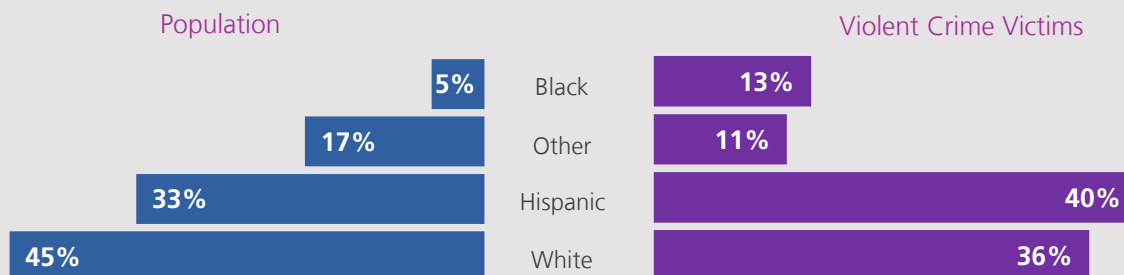
⁴ Langton, L. & Truman, J. (2014). *Socio-Emotional Impact of Violent Crime*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Justice Program, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available online at bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/sivc.pdf

2019 violent crime victim characteristics

RACE/ETHNICITY The racial/ethnic characteristics of violent crime victims differed somewhat compared to their representation in the San Diego region. Black individuals were nearly three times more likely to be a victim of violent crime, compared to their proportion in the population. Hispanic individuals were also overrepresented as violent crime victims although to a lesser degree. Conversely, Whites and individuals of Other races were underrepresented as violent crime victims, compared to their representation in the population (Figure 1).

Figure 1:

Violent crime victims by race/ethnicity in the San Diego region, 2019



Sources: SANDAG; SANDAG 2019 Population and Housing Estimates

RACE/ETHNICITY AND VIOLENT CRIME TYPE When examined by type of crime, White individuals were underrepresented in all crime categories except rape, compared to their proportion in the population. This trend was also true for victims of Other races who were underrepresented in all four categories. Hispanic individuals comprised a similar proportion of rape victims as their representation in the population, but were overrepresented in the three other violent crime categories. Black individuals were two to three times overrepresented as victims in all four crime types compared to their proportion in the population (Table 1).

Table 1:

Violent crime type by victims' ethnicity/race in the San Diego region, 2019

	Population	Homicide	Rape ⁴	Robbery	Aggravated Assault
Black	5%	17%	11%	10%	15%
Other	17%	13%	8%	14%	10%
Hispanic	33%	40%	34%	44%	39%
White	45%	30%	48%	32%	37%

Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding. All homicide data are gathered from Law Enforcement Supplementals for 2019.

Sources: SANDAG; SANDAG 2019 Population and Housing Estimates; 2019 Homicide Supplemental report

⁴ The FBI definition of rape changed in 2015 to include male victims and a greater number of eligible actions.

AGE AND VIOLENT CRIME TYPE Crime victimization also varied by age. Young adults 18 to 24 (20%) and 25 to 39 (35%) years old were overrepresented as violent crime victims compared to their proportion in the population (12% and 22% respectively) (Figure 2). This overrepresentation held true across all crime categories for these two age groups (Table 2). Children and teens, 17 years old and younger, as well as individuals 60 years and older, were underrepresented among violent crime victims. While similar to their proportion in the population, it is still worth noting that rape was the violent crime category children were most often a victim (19%).

Figure 2:
Violent crime victims by age in the San Diego region, 2019

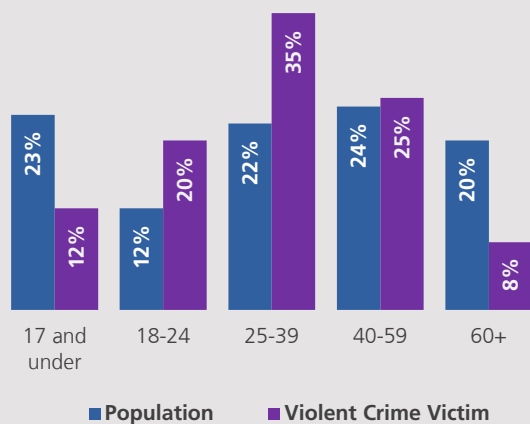


Table 2:
Violent crime type by victims' age in the San Diego region, 2019

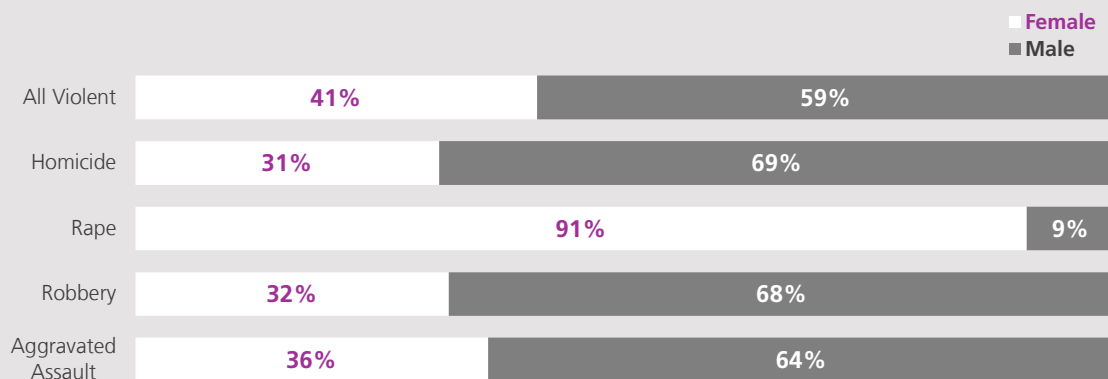
	Population	Homicide	Rape	Robbery	Aggravated Assault
17 and under	23%	10%	19%	13%	11%
18-24	12%	17%	29%	24%	17%
25-39	22%	33%	33%	33%	36%
40-59	24%	30%	18%	22%	27%
60+	20%	9%	2%	8%	9%

Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Sources: SANDAG; SANDAG 2019 Population and Housing Estimates

GENDER AND VIOLENT CRIME TYPE While females and males each represent half of the population, females comprised 41% of all violent crime victims and were underrepresented in all categories except rape. Specifically, females comprised 9 out of 10 of all rape victims and around 1 in 3 of all other types of violent crime victims (Figure 3).

Figure 3:
Violent crime type by victims' gender in the San Diego region, 2019



Sources: SANDAG; 2019 Homicide Supplemental report

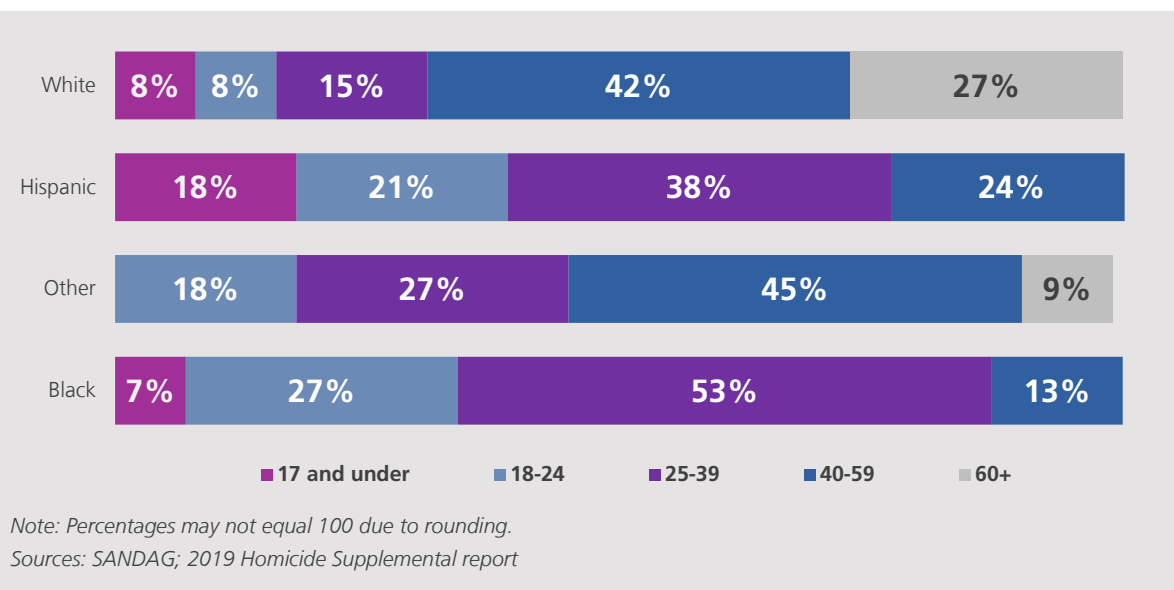
2019 homicide victim characteristics

Given the seriousness and devastating impact of homicide, additional analysis is provided on the characteristics of homicide victims. In 2019, there were 86 reported homicides in the San Diego region, 66 (or 77%) of which had a known motive at the time of this report. As with victims of other violent crimes, homicide data show little fluctuation over the years in the characteristics and motives behind the homicides. Adults under 40 years old were most at risk, assailants usually knew their victims, and arguments were the most common motive behind homicides in 2019.

RACE/ETHNICITY AND AGE Similar to all violent crime, a victim’s race/ethnicity and age often differed from their overall proportion in the general population. Hispanic victims had the greatest proportion of young victims with 18% 17 years of age and younger and 21% between the ages of 18 and 24. In addition, none of the Hispanic victims were older than 59 years of age. White homicide victims had the largest proportion of older victims (42% were 40 to 59 years old and 27% were 60 and older). None of the Black homicide victims were older than 59 and among those of Other ethnicities, none were younger than 18 (Figure 4).

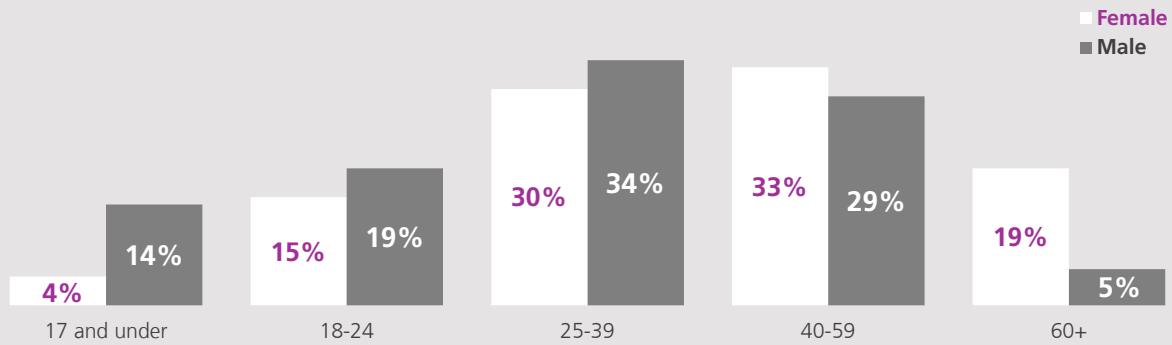
Figure 4:

Homicide victims by age and race/ethnicity in the San Diego region, 2019



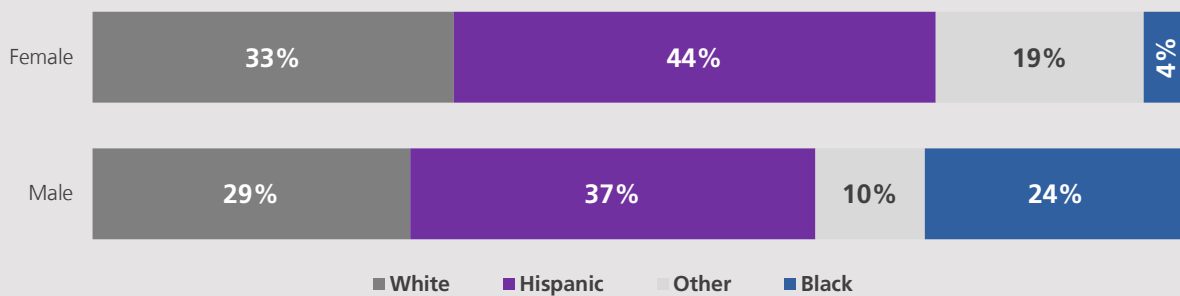
GENDER, AGE, RACE, AND MOTIVE Specifically, while around half of female homicide victims were 40 or older, only around one-third of male victims were (Figure 5). In addition, females were more likely to be a victim of a domestic violence motivated homicide (67% versus 16% for males) (Figure 7). Conversely, the motives for male homicide victims were more likely to be an argument (44%) or gang related (24%). In terms of gender and race, a greater percentage of female homicide victims were White, Hispanic, and Other ethnicities and a greater percentage of male homicide victims were Black individuals (Figure 6).

Figure 5:
Homicide victims by gender and age in the San Diego region, 2019



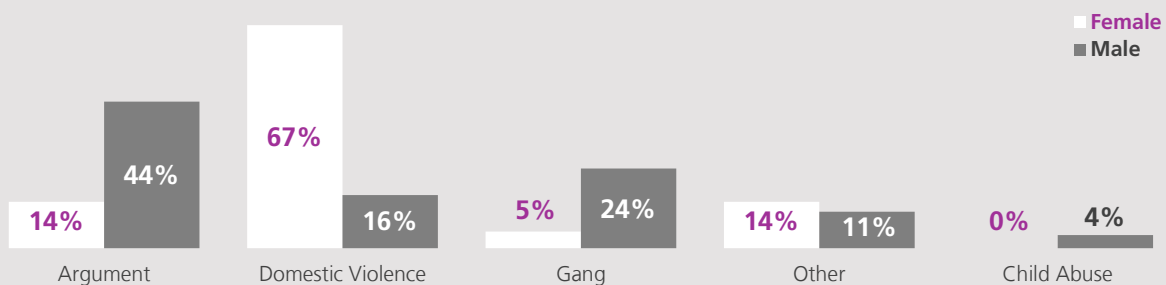
Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding
Sources: SANDAG; 2019 Homicide Supplemental report

Figure 6:
Homicide victims by gender and race/ethnicity in the San Diego region, 2019



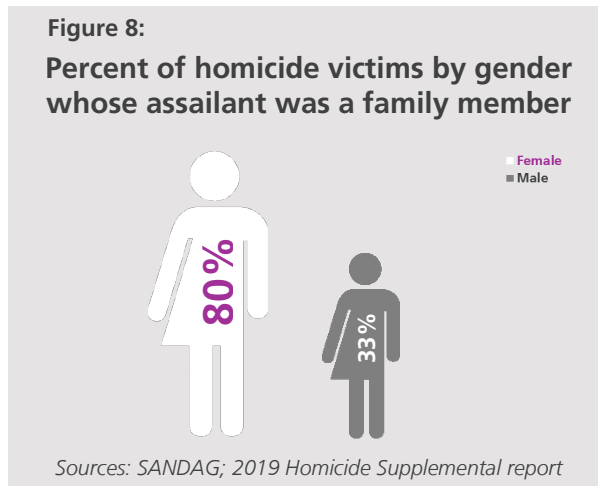
Sources: SANDAG; 2019 Homicide Supplemental report

Figure 7:
Homicide victims by gender and motive in the San Diego region, 2019

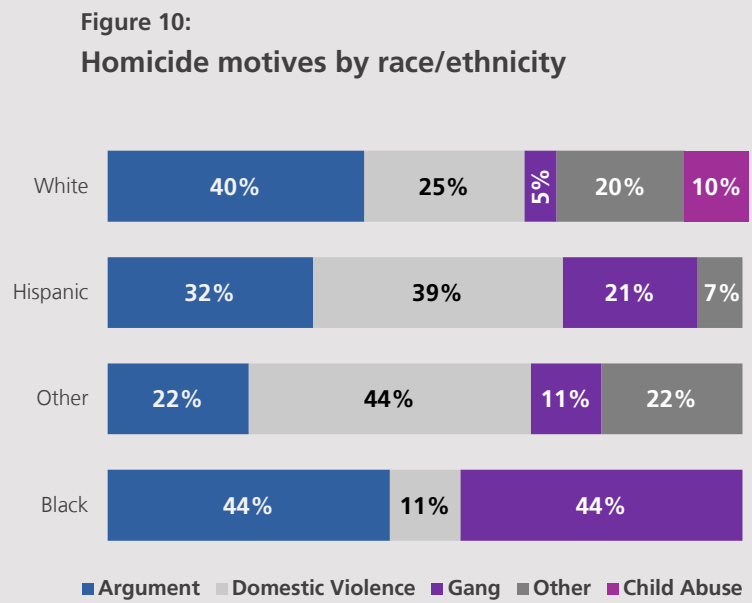
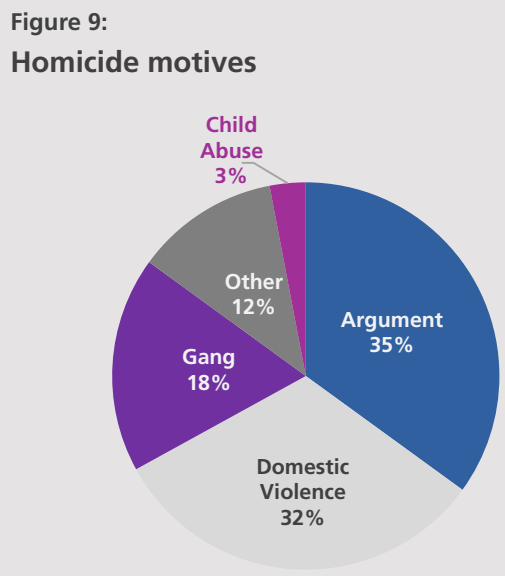


Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.
Sources: SANDAG; 2019 Homicide Supplemental report

HOMICIDE VICTIM'S RELATIONSHIP WITH SUSPECT Where the relationship between homicide victim and suspect was known (61 cases), nearly three-quarters (72%) of the victims knew the suspect, however this varied by gender. Specifically, the known suspect in 8 out of 10 (80%) female homicides was a family member (i.e., spouse, parent, or intimate partner), compared to 1 in 3 (33%) of male homicide victims (Figure 8).



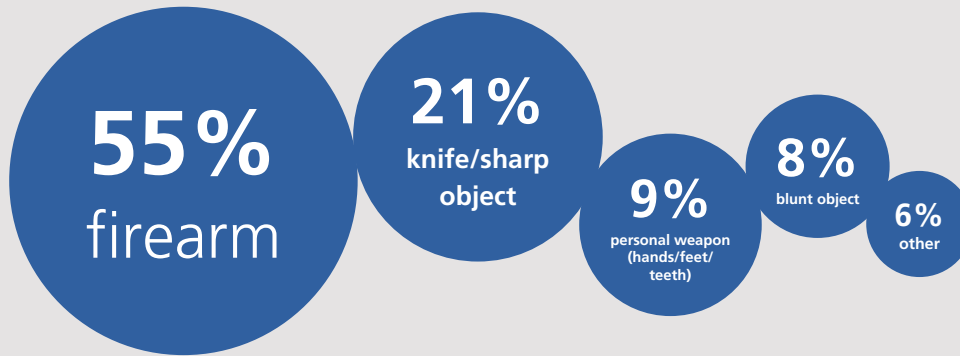
RACE/ETHNICITY AND MOTIVE For the 66 homicide cases where motive could be determined, arguments were the most frequent precipitating event (35%), followed closely by domestic violence (32%). Gang involvement accounted for nearly 1 in 5 homicides (18%), other motives (robbery, burglary, hate crime, and unspecified) were noted 12% of the time, and child abuse accounted for 3% (Figure 9). In addition to analysis by gender and age, a review of race/ethnicity by motive showed variation in the precipitating event. An argument or gang involvement was the most prevalent motive for Black homicide victims (44% each), while domestic violence (39%) and arguments (32%) were the most frequent reasons for Hispanic victims. Domestic violence was the most frequent reason for those individuals of Other races (44%) (Figure 10).



Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.
 Sources: SANDAG; 2019 Homicide Supplemental report

WEAPONS USED Not surprising given their lethality, firearms were the most frequently used weapon (55%) in homicides in 2019, followed by a knife/sharp object (21%), 9% personal weapon (hand, feet, teeth), blunt object (8%), and other means (incendiary device, hanging, other) (6%) (Figure 11). When examined by motive, all (100%) gang involved homicides involved a firearm, as did more than half (52%) of domestic violence homicides, 44% of those precipitated by an argument, and 38% of those homicides with other motives (Figure 12).

Figure 11:
Weapons used in homicides in the San Diego region, 2019



Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.
Sources: SANDAG; 2019 Homicide Supplemental report

Figure 12:
Homicides involving a firearm by motive in the San Diego region, 2019

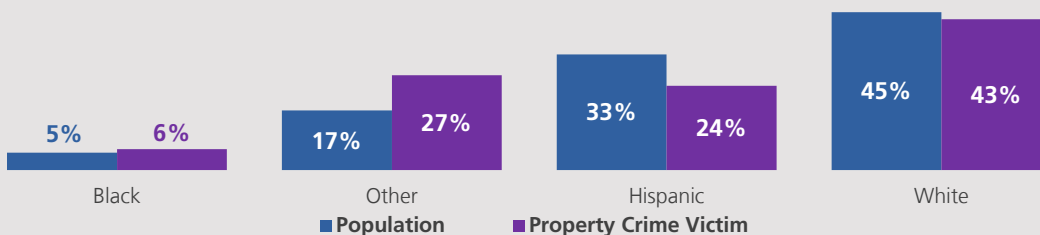


Sources: SANDAG; 2019 Homicide Supplemental report

2019 Property crime victim characteristics

RACE/ETHNICITY Characteristics of property crime victims differed from those of violent crime, with White and Black property crime victims similarly represented as their proportion in the population. However, Other race victims were overrepresented and Hispanic victims were underrepresented (Figure 13). It is important to note fewer individuals report property crimes (34%) than violent (43%), and only the characteristics of one victim is reported, even though there may have been multiple victims in one household (e.g., a residential burglary).

Figure 13:
Property crime victims in the San Diego region, 2019



Sources: SANDAG; SANDAG 2019 Population and Housing Estimates

RACE/ETHNICITY AND PROPERTY CRIME TYPE When considering race/ethnicity and type of property crime, individuals who identified as Other races were overrepresented in all property crime types, especially among motor vehicle theft victims. Conversely Hispanic victims were underrepresented in all categories. Motor vehicle theft was the only category White victims were underrepresented compared to their proportion in the population (Table 3).

Table 3:

Property crime type by victims’ race/ethnicity in the San Diego region, 2019

	Population	Burglary	Larceny	Motor Vehicle Theft
Black	5%	6%	6%	5%
Other	17%	22%	22%	39%
Hispanic	33%	24%	24%	30%
White	45%	48%	48%	27%

Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Sources: SANDAG; SANDAG 2019 Population and Housing Estimates

AGE AND PROPERTY CRIME TYPE The variation in age and crime victimization tracked similarly to the natural workforce development and life course. Not surprising given their dependency on adults, children and youth were the least likely to be victims of property crime and are underrepresented compared to their proportion in the population, while those adults aged 25 to 39 and 40 to 59 were the most likely to be victims and were also overrepresented compared to their proportion in the population (Figure 14). While underrepresented, the proportion for property crime victims 60 years and older was almost twice their representation of violent crime victims (8%). This pattern was the same when examined by type of property crime victimization. Across all crime types, adults aged 25 to 39 and 40 to 59 were overrepresented (Table 4).

Figure 14:

Property crime victims by age in the San Diego region, 2019



Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Sources: SANDAG; SANDAG 2019 Population and Housing Estimates

Table 4:

Property categories by victims’ age in the San Diego region, 2019

	Population	Burglary	Larceny	Motor Vehicle Theft
17 and under	23%	1%	3%	<1%
18-24	12%	13%	13%	12%
25-39	22%	39%	37%	38%
40-59	24%	32%	32%	35%
60+	20%	15%	15%	14%

GENDER AND PROPERTY CRIME TYPE Males were again overrepresented as victims, comprising 58% of all property crime victims (Figure 15). This overrepresentation was greater with motor vehicle thefts, with males accounting for 69% of motor vehicle theft victims compared to about one-third (31%) of females (Figure 16). As with all property crime victims, the characteristics may be a reflection of the person who reports the crime.

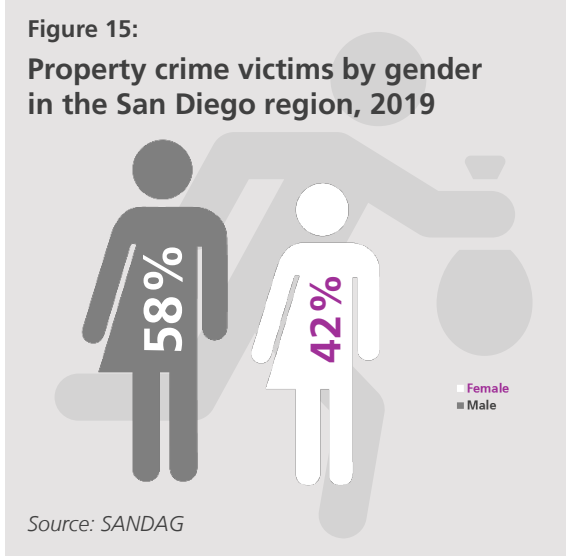
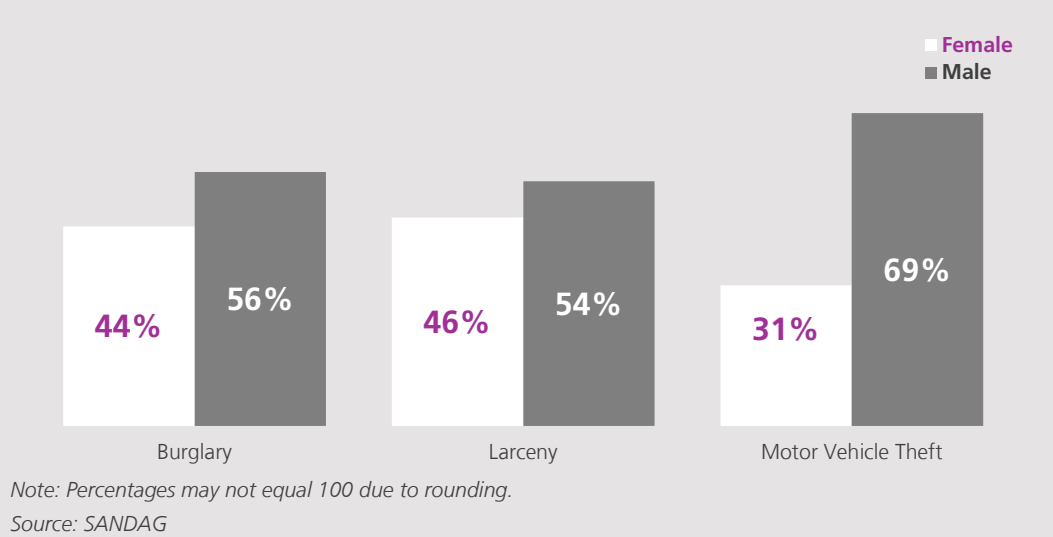


Figure 16:
Property crime type by victims' gender in the San Diego region, 2019



2019 violent crime suspect characteristics

Because property crime suspects are less likely to be known, only characteristics of violent crime victims are presented. As with victim’s data, suspect characteristics varied by crime type. Suspects were more likely to be younger, Black, or Hispanic individuals, and male than their representation in the population. Specifically, suspects between the ages of 18 to 24 and 25 to 39 were overrepresented in all crime categories than their representation in the population. Individuals identified as Black were nearly 5 to 8 times more likely to be identified as a suspect than their representation in the population and Hispanic individuals, to a smaller degree were overrepresented as suspects in all crime cases. It would be remiss when presenting these data to not acknowledge the plethora of research and statistics on racial overrepresentation and disparities in the United States criminal justice system contributing this disproportionality. The reasons contributing to this overrepresentation of Black and Hispanic individuals are complex and well documented and, while not the focus of this Brief, do offer a contextual lens for these data.^{5 6 7}

Table 5:

Characteristics of violent crime suspects varied by type of crime

	Population	Homicide	Rape	Robbery	Aggravated Assault
White	45%	31%	33%	18%	31%
Hispanic	33%	31%	34%	39%	42%
Other	17%	15%	9%	4%	6%
Black	5%	24%	24%	39%	21%
< 17	23%	8%	8%	19%	7%
18 to 24	12%	18%	24%	27%	18%
25 to 39	22%	47%	40%	38%	44%
40 to 59	24%	19%	23%	14%	26%
60+	20%	7%	5%	2%	5%
Male	50%	93%	97%	84%	82%
Female	50%	7%	3%	16%	18%

Sources: SANDAG; SANDAG 2019 Population and Housing Estimates; 2019 Homicide Supplemental report

⁵ Mauer, M. (2010). Justice for All? Challenging Racial Disparities in the Criminal Justice System. Published in *Human Rights, Volume 37, Number 4*. (Fall 2010). © 2010 by the American Bar Association

⁶ Nellis, A. (2016). *The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons*. The Sentencing Project. Retrieved from [sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf](https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf)

⁷ The Sentencing Project. (2018). *Report of The Sentencing Project to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance Regarding Racial Disparities in the United States Criminal Justice System*. Washington, D.C. Available online at [sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/UN-Report-on-Racial-Disparities.pdf](https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/UN-Report-on-Racial-Disparities.pdf)

Summary

To better understand the larger impact of crime, it is important to provide data on victims as part of any crime series or discussion to understand who is at greatest risk for specific crimes. It also is important to keep in mind when reviewing this information that only around one-third of property crimes and two in five violent crimes are reported to the law enforcement. Furthermore, it is advisable to view the victim and suspect data in the larger societal context of historic racial disparities in the U.S. criminal justice system. While crime rates have fluctuated over the years, there has been little change in the characteristics of both victims and suspects. Below are key takeaways from these analyses.

- Age matters, with younger adults more likely to be both a victim and suspect of violent crimes.
- Except for rape, males comprised the majority of crime victims and nearly all suspects.
- Females were two and half times more likely to be killed by a family member, compared to males.
- Arguments and domestic violence were the two most prevalent motives for homicides in 2019. Firearms were used in all gang homicides and more than half of domestic violence ones.
- Black victims were overrepresented in all violent crime categories, as were Hispanic individuals, but to a lesser degree. This overrepresentation was also evident for suspect data.
- Characteristics of property crime victims differed from victims of violent crime, which could be a reflection of who is more likely to report a crime for a household. Individuals identified as an Other race were overrepresented as victims and Hispanic individuals were underrepresented. Individuals of working ages were the most susceptible to being property crime victims.