

## Risk Factors of Murder and Non-Negligent Manslaughter

*Summary of Key Factors:* Gang activity; Gun accessibility; Drug trade; Drug and alcohol use; Unemployment.

*Aim:* To assist analysts with the identification of risk factors for the production of risk terrain maps. Specifically, this brief provides an annotated review of the factors related to murder/manslaughter and the settings and times for which some factors may be most relevant. This information should be especially useful to help choose a time period for creating risk terrain maps (i.e., Step<sup>i</sup> 3), to identify aggravating and mitigating risk factors to include in your risk terrain model (i.e., Steps 5 and 6), and to inform the operationalization of your risk factors to risk map layers (i.e., Step 7).

*By:* Jill Drucker

### Operational Definition

For the purpose of this research brief, murder and non-negligent manslaughter are defined as “the willful killing of one human being by another” excluding deaths caused by negligence, suicide, or accident as well as justifiable homicides.<sup>ii</sup>

### Aggravating/Mitigating Risk Factors Based on a Review of Empirical Literature

#### Gang Activity

From 1993 through 2003, gang members perpetrated approximately 373,000 of the 6.6 million violent victimizations that occurred each year.<sup>iii</sup> Gangs are often responsible for violent incidents involving the use of firearms, especially those incidents involving youths.<sup>iv</sup> From 1994 through 1997, almost two-thirds of youth murders in Minneapolis, Minnesota were gang-related. Gang-related homicides can be traced back to illegal money making ventures or long standing gang rivalries.<sup>v</sup> Deadly drive-by shootings where an individual or individuals fire a gun from a vehicle at another vehicle, person, or structure are commonly committed by gang organizations to strike fear in rival gangs, as a means of appearing fearless, to show gang loyalty, as acts of retaliation, and over territory disputes.<sup>vi</sup>

#### Gun Accessibility

In 2009, firearms were used in 67.1% of the homicides analyzed by the FBI.<sup>vii</sup> Research findings indicate firearm availability is positively associated with homicide rates. Locations with higher levels of firearm ownership are plagued with higher homicide rates.<sup>viii</sup>

#### Drug Trade

Drug markets are often associated with violent offenses, particularly homicides. Those involved in the drug trade are more likely to resort to violence due to competition for customers and drug markets and as a way to solve disputes.<sup>ix</sup>

#### Drug and Alcohol Use

Drug use may be related to increased incidences of homicide. In 1997, the percentage of federal prison inmates convicted of murder who reported being under the influence of drugs at the time of their offense was 29.4% while the percentage of state prison inmates convicted of murder who reported being under the influence of drugs at the time of their offense was 26.8%.<sup>x</sup> The most frequently cited circumstance surrounding the commission of a homicide is an argument. Arguments include brawls caused by the influence of alcohol or narcotics.<sup>xi</sup>

#### Unemployment

In a study of homicide in eight major cities in the United States, researchers found that as employment declined homicide rates increased and as employment increased homicide rates dropped.<sup>xii</sup>

## Demographic Factors

Of the 13,636 total homicide victims analyzed by the FBI in 2009, 6,556 (48.1%) victims were Black, 6,568 (48.2%) were White, and 360 (2.6%) were classified as Other. In regards to gender, 10,496 (77.0%) of victims were male and 3,122 (22.9%) were female. The highest percentage of homicide victims were in the age range from 20-24 with 2,426 homicide victims in 2009.<sup>xiii</sup>

Of the 15,760 total homicide offenders analyzed by the FBI in 2009, 5,890 (37.4%) were Black, 5,286 (33.5%) were White, and 245 (1.6%). Males comprised 10,391 (65.9%) of the total offenders while females comprised 1,197 (7.6%). In regards to age, the highest percentage of homicide offenders were in the age range from 20-24 with 2,682 homicide offenders in 2009.<sup>xiv</sup>

## Setting Effects

In 2009 an estimated 13,408 murders and acts of non-negligent manslaughter occurred in metropolitan areas while only 1,035 occurred in nonmetropolitan counties and 798 occurred in cities outside metropolitan areas.<sup>xv</sup>

Murder rates, particularly those involving firearms, were higher in the southern United States and on the west coast. New England, the Mountain region, and the East North Central regions of the United States saw lower murder rates.<sup>xvi</sup>

## Temporal Differences

The majority of gun violence occurs between 7 p.m. and 1 a.m., according to the Kansas City Gun Experiment.<sup>xvii</sup> Drive-by shootings also frequently occur at night as the darkness can prevent the offenders from being detected or identified.<sup>xviii</sup>

Homicides are more likely to occur on national holidays and weekends as there are more personal interactions. In addition, the spring and summer months, excluding June, were found to have the highest homicide rates.<sup>xix</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> For steps of risk terrain map production, download the RTM Manual at [www.riskterrainmodeling.com](http://www.riskterrainmodeling.com)

<sup>ii</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics (n.d.). *Homicide*. Retrieved February 16, 2010, from <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=311>

<sup>iii</sup> Harrell, E. (2005). *Violence by gang members, 1993-2003*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>iv</sup> Braga, A. A. (2003). *Gun violence among serious young offenders*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>v</sup> Kennedy, D. M., & Braga, A. A. (1998). Homicide in Minneapolis: Research for problem solving. *Homicide Studies*, 2(3), 263-290.

<sup>vi</sup> Dedel, K. (2007). *Drive-by shootings*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>vii</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2010). *Crime in the United States 2009*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>viii</sup> Hepburn, L. M., & Hemenway, D. (2004). Firearm availability and homicide: A review of the literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 9(4), 417-440.

<sup>ix</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy. (2000). *Drug-related crime fact sheet*. Washington, DC: Office of National Drug Control Policy.

<sup>x</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy. (2000). *Drug-related crime fact sheet*. Washington, DC: Office of National Drug Control Policy.

<sup>xi</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2010). *Crime in the United States 2009*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>xii</sup> National Institute of Justice. (1997). *A study of homicide in eight U.S. cities: An NIJ intramural research project*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice.

<sup>xiii</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2010). *Crime in the United States 2009*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>xiv</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2010). *Crime in the United States 2009*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>xv</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (2010). *Crime in the United States 2009*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>xvi</sup> Fox, J. A., & Zawitz, M. W. (2004). *Homicide trends in the United States: 2002 update*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>xvii</sup> Sherman, L. W., Shaw, J. W., & Rogan, D. P. (1995). *The Kansas City gun experiment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice.

<sup>xviii</sup> Dedel, K. (2007). *Drive-by shootings*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>xix</sup> Tennenbaum, A. N., & Fink, E. L. (1994). Temporal regularities in homicide: Cycles, seasons, and autoregression. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 10(4), 317-342.