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The Study of Homicide Caseload: Creating a Comprehensive Homicide Dataset

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Introduction

Historically, studies that have explored the characteristics and causes of homicide have treated it as a homogeneous type of crime. Williams and Flewelling, in their 1988 review of comparative homicide studies, found that research that examined disaggregated homicide rates was the rare exception, rather than the rule. They criticized earlier research that failed to disaggregate homicide estimates, arguing that such an approach "can mask or imprecisely reveal empirical relationships indicative of a differential causal process operating in the social production of criminal homicide." (p.422)

In recent years, researchers have advocated treating homicide as a collection of very different types of events linked only by a common outcome. Williams and Flewelling advocated disaggregating homicides according to the theoretical focus of the research problem. Block's (1985) homicide syndrome taxonomy recognized a range of homicide types based upon the offender's intent at the time of the murder. Maxfield (1989) stressed the importance of examining homicide types separately in testing theoretical propositions.

Researchers attempting to understand homicide have increasingly focused on differences among types of homicide and the need to address the different types in different ways. Because national homicide data have been criticized as being inadequate to differentiate among the various types of homicide most of the research that examines different types of homicides separately has been conducted using local area data.

The purpose of this paper is to outline problems that existing homicide data present to researchers exploring the causes and correlates of homicide, and to present a case study of current research that attempts to ameliorate some of these problems.

National estimates of homicide in the United States

Homicide is the killing of one human being by another. The legal system recognizes different categories of homicide. Some, such as murder and non-negligent manslaughter are considered criminal homicide. Others, such as legal intervention and self defense are considered non-criminal homicide.

National estimates of the number of homicides in the United States are derived primarily from the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Mortality System administered by the National Center for Health Statistics, (NCHS). The UCR program includes an additional aspect, the Supplemental Homicide Report (SHR), that provides additional information about murders.

Of the two programs, the Mortality System is more inclusive. The UCR includes murder and non-negligent manslaughter but excludes such deaths as law enforcement killings of offenders during crimes and negligent manslaughter. The Mortality System data include these deaths as well as executions. While published NCHS estimates generally include non-criminal homicides and negligent manslaughter, it is possible to produce estimates definitionally similar to those of the UCR (Cantor and Cohen, 1980).

In addition to these two programs, the Bureau of Justice Statistics maintains a number of court and correctional data series include data on murder cases and persons accused or convicted of murder.

Problems identified in existing homicide estimates

Many researchers have evaluated and compared the UCR and Mortality System homicide estimation programs. Most studies have concluded that both programs present reliable estimates of homicide in the United States despite problems that hinder the completeness or accuracy of their estimates to some degree. Hindelang (1974) determined that historically the two systems tracked well, thereby validating both systems as reasonable estimators of the offense. Cantor and Cohen (1980) found the two series to be highly correlated from 1936-1973, but recommended use of the NCHS data as being more accurate. Rokaw et al.(1990) ascertained that the Mortality System annual homicide estimates were, on average, about 9% higher than SHR homicide estimates and attributed the differences to four factors: differences in coverage of the U.S. population, differences in the practices or rules governing the reporting of homicide deaths to NCHS and the FBI, differences in the criteria used in defining a case as a homicide, and differences in the categories used and the rules employed to classify people among demographic subgroups. (p.451)

Subnational datasets exist that underscore the differences between different data systems measuring homicide. Keppel's Homicide Information and Tracking System (HITS) obtained information from a number of sources on all Washington State homicide cases he could find, including law enforcement agencies, coroners, vital statistics, and UCR systems (Keppel et al, 1990). Keppel found that there were discrepancies in the number of homicide victims in Washington State between 1981-1986 as reported by the various systems. The following table displays the differing counts and sources of the estimates:

Source	Victims	Percent difference from actual
Total actual victims*	1,309	-
Vital Statistics	1,099	-16.0%
UCR	1,247	-4.7%
ME/Coroner	1,030	-21.3%
Police/Sheriff	1,302	-0.5%

*The total actual victims estimate was arrived at after studying all the cases from each of the homicide data sources.

Source: Keppel et al.(1990), p.7.

The police and sheriff's departments had records for virtually every homicide that occurred (1,302 of 1,309), but published estimates which are derived from Vital Statistics (based on death certificates) and the UCR fell well below the actual number of homicides that occurred in Washington State during the period. The HITS project attributed the discrepancies to a number of factors, including difficulty in identifying the correct victim name, failure to update death classifications on records, incorrect coding of death cause, failure to keep systematic records, and underreporting in multiple victim homicides.

It is possible that some or all of the difference between the UCR count of homicides and Keppel's count of all homicide victims can be attributed to the exclusion in the UCR counts of deaths due to police intervention and negligent manslaughter. Hindelang (1974) calculated that deaths caused by police intervention represented up to 5% of all homicides nationally. The difference between the UCR counts

and the total actual victims warrants further examination because if the differences are not definitional, it could be an indication that published UCR estimates are significantly undercounting murders.

Potential undercounts and missing data are only two of the problems confronting homicide researchers attempting to work with national homicide data. The two national homicide datasets contain few explanatory variables to enable data users and researchers to adequately differentiate among the various types of events that have occurred. The Mortality System data contain no information on circumstances, and no information about offenders. The SHR has both victim and offender data, but has a great deal of missing data and very few explanatory variables. Maxfield (1989) concluded that "variation in coding and completeness by state and city potentially undermines attempts to test theoretical explanations of murder using SHR data".(p.691) Moreover, the data either focus on victims or on offenders, not both. Offender based datasets, such as the National Correctional Reporting Program, have no victim information.

A further issue concerning both the Mortality System and the UCR is their place in, and relationship with, the criminal justice system. Both programs determine cause of death independently (at least in theory) from other agencies or decisions. NCHS Mortality system data are based upon the findings of coroners and medical examiners. In the UCR, "the classification of this offense [murder], as for all other Crime Index offenses, is based solely on police investigation as opposed to the determination of a court, medical examiner, coroner, jury, or other judicial body" (FBI 1992, p13).

Judicial proceedings in murder cases, perhaps more so than for other types of crime, often focus not only on the culpability of persons accused of the crime, but on the nature of the death itself. Grand juries and court trials commonly rule upon whether deaths were accidental, the result of negligence, justifiable or criminal. Court outcome and incarceration statistics, therefore reflect not only the degree to which law enforcement was able to arrest offenders, but also the degree to which the criminal justice system alters the original determination of the event.

The extent to which persons accused of murder are convicted of that crime are reflected in the summary statistics presented in table 1. In 1986, 75% of the murders were cleared by arrest. The number of persons arrested was only slightly smaller than the number of murders, so that there were 1.4 persons arrested for every murder cleared by arrest. (These statistics ignore the time lag between murders, arrests and convictions which insures that arrests and convictions for some fraction of murders probably occur in subsequent years. To the extent that murder rates

Table 1. Murder and non-negligent homicide
in the United States, 1986

Reported to police ¹	20,610
Cleared by arrest ¹	14,468
Persons arrested ¹	19,910
Convicted of murder/ non-neg homicide ²	9,854
Sentence: ²	
incarceration	9,384
prison	9,118
prison/jail term	6,807
life	2,280
death ³	297

Sources: ¹ Crime in the United States, 1986.
FBI, 1987

² Profile of Felons Convicted in State
Courts, 1986.BJS, 1990

³ Felony Sentences in State Courts,
1986. BJS, 1989

and clearance rates remain stable, over the long term the effect of the time lag will even out.) About half of all persons arrested for murder were convicted of murder.

It is difficult to draw too many conclusions from the above statistics because the murder counts are derived from one system based on victim data and the arrest, conviction and sentencing data are based upon offender based data systems. Furthermore, researchers attempting to explore characteristics of specific cases that led to particular outcomes cannot use either Mortality System or UCR data because these programs lack sufficient information and are not linked to court or corrections data. Therefore, for example, it is not possible to determine the number of deaths for which persons convicted of murder were responsible. Nor is there any data in the offender based data system about murder circumstances.

Presumably, a substantial percentage of those not convicted of murder were convicted of a lesser crime. While such data are not available for 1986, data for 1988 indicate that murder convictions represent about 3/4 of the convictions of persons arrested for murder.(BJS 1990, p13) We do not know, however, how many UCR murders were found to be justified, accidental or negligent by the judicial system, nor do we have information about cases not resulting in conviction.

Additionally, national homicide data cannot be used to address such questions as: How many cases were dropped because grand juries or prosecutors judged the deaths to be justified, accidental, or negligent rather than murder? How do the cases of those convicted of homicide differ from those convicted of lesser crimes? Do persons who kill relatives received lighter sentences than those who kill strangers? What proportion of all death eligible cases are represented by the 297 death sentences, and how do those resulting in death sentences differ from those that were eligible but which did not lead to death sentences? How do murders resulting in arrest differ from those in which no arrests were made? Do any factors associated with conviction for murder operate differently for victims or accused killers with different socioeconomic or other characteristics?

In order to answer questions such as those posed above for the Nation as a whole, it is necessary to construct a national dataset that 1) contains detailed information about homicide victims, perpetrators and the circumstances surrounding the death and 2) follows homicide cases as they progress through the criminal justice system. While such datasets exist at the local level, (e.g. the Chicago Homicide Project conducted by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and the St. Louis Homicide Project conducted by the University of Missouri-St. Louis)¹, at the National level no dataset exists that links information on a specific victim with information about the offender(s) in the crime.

Certainly the importance of local area studies should not be minimized. Much important research is conducted using sub-national data. Inevitably, however, questions arise as to whether the results of such studies are generalizable to the entire nation. At some stage, national studies are important, if only to replicate the results of local studies at the national level.

The Study of Homicide Casflow

The Bureau of Justice Statistics is in the process of creating a comprehensive National homicide database that incorporates information on homicide victims, information derived from police investigations and information for a sample of homicide cases as the cases progressed through the criminal justice system. The project is called "The Study of Homicide Casflow."

When completed, the study will be useful in exploring aspects of homicide that cannot be addressed using data restricted to only victims or only offenders and demonstrate the utility of such tracking datasets for improving estimates of murders, and possibly be a precursor for improvements to National homicide data. Because data collection is not yet completed, the remainder of the paper will be devoted to a discussion of the inception and implementation of the project.

Study description

The study as originally conceived has five steps:

1. Selecting a sample of homicide victims.
2. Matching the sample of victims with appropriate Supplemental Homicide Reports cases.
3. Obtaining information from law enforcement agencies for these cases.
4. Obtaining information from prosecutors on trial results.
5. Obtaining corrections information on convicted murderers.

Because no component of the criminal justice system contains all the information required for this project; victim data, law enforcement data, court and corrections data, a major aspect of the project is obtaining the pertinent information from whatever source possible, victim data from death certificates, investigation data from law enforcement agencies, and so forth. The data obtained from all the sources will be combined into a comprehensive dataset to explore how the characteristics of victims, offenders and criminal events affect the outcomes of police investigations, and judicial proceedings.

One of the difficulties in constructing a dataset that includes victim and offender information to the extent necessary for the study is that there is no linkage in criminal justice system data between victims and offenders. While police data are filed by victim name, from the judicial stage onward, cases can be identified only by arrestee or offender name, not by victim name. To determine the final disposition of homicide cases, it is therefore necessary to identify both victims and offenders.

For this study then, it was necessary to locate a source of homicide victim information that included the victim's name. The only national source of data on homicide victims, for which names are available is the file of death certificates maintained by the National Center for Health Statistics.

Because the manpower and monetary resources available for the project were limited, it was necessary to select a sub-year sample of homicides. To simplify both sample selection and data collection, a fraction of the year rather than a fraction of the murders was sampled. Selecting such a sample using a start with/take every approach would have been extremely inefficient and would have required state health and police departments to access records across an entire year. Therefore, a one month period was chosen as the sample period because it was estimated that one month would provide a manageable sample with sufficient cases for analysis.

At the time the study was originally proposed in 1988, the most recent Uniform Crime Report SHR data available were for 1986. July, 1986, midway through the year, was arbitrarily selected as the sample month. UCR data indicated that about 1,940 homicide cases could be expected for that month.

Obtaining death certificates

The next step involved obtaining the death certificates for all homicides deaths occurring during July, 1986. Rather than obtaining certificates from each state separately, the certificates were obtained through a National Center for Health Statistics program designed to assist researchers who require death certificates for their research projects. This process involves submitting supporting project documentation to NCHS which then transmits it to the appropriate office in each state for review. If approved by the state, NCHS delivers to the researcher a list of death certificate identification numbers. The researcher then must contact the state office and purchase or obtain the certificates through them.

In June, 1988 a request for all certificates for persons who died during July, 1986 whose cause of death was listed as homicide, (E codes E960-E978), was submitted to NCHS. In February, 1989, a printout was received from NCHS that included death certificate identifying numbers for all July, 1986 homicides in every state save New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia and upstate New York. (New York City maintains a separate record system.)

Letters were then sent to the appropriate offices in each state, requesting that death certificates be transmitted to BJS for the project. In response to the letter, most states submitted bills for the certificates ranging from \$.60 to \$8.00 per certificate. A few states provided the certificates without cost.

Data elements collected from death certificates

- Victim name
- Victim age, race, sex, marital status, ethnicity
- City, county of attack
- City, county of death
- Place of attack
- Place of death
- Injury date
- Death date
- Whether date of death was definite or estimated
- Time of attack
- Cause of death
- Weapon used to commit homicide
- Motive

Textual summary of death certificate information

The process of actually obtaining the certificates from all the approving states consumed 10 months; the certificates from the last state being received in November, 1989. Certificates from most states were received during June and July, 1989. As the certificates were received, data were keyed on a flow basis. The file of homicides in July, 1986 based on death certificates had 1,855 cases from all states and the District of Columbia, except Maryland, New Jersey, Virginia and upstate New York. The information extracted from the certificates is shown in Figure 1.

Matching death certificates to SHR cases

After certificates were received, an attempt was made to match each death certificate case to its equivalent case on the SHR file. To enable this match, the SHR had to be reconfigured from a case-based dataset to a victim-based dataset. Each record in the SHR file allows coding of up to 10 victims and 11 offenders. The records for the 1,876 homicide cases, including negligent manslaughter and justifiable homicide victims, for July, 1986 were extracted and converted to a victim-based format; creating a separate record for each victim in multiple victim homicides. Case identifiers were created to allow linkage of multiple victims. While the SHR file allows for up to 10 victims, the most in any July, 1986 case was 5. Thus, a file of 1,938 homicide victims was created. Of these, 1,907 were victims of murder or nonnegligent manslaughter, and 31 were victims of negligent manslaughter. (The negligent manslaughter victims were kept in the file because, while not the crime of interest, such cases could have been coded as homicides on death certificates). Figure 2 displays the pertinent information provided for each case by the SHR.

Data elements collected from the Supplemental Homicide Reports

- City and county
- Victim age, race, sex, and ethnicity
- Offender age, race, sex, and ethnicity
- Victim/Offender relationship
- Circumstance
- Subcircumstance
- Weapon

Figure 2

One of the SHR's major weaknesses is that it does not contain data for all homicides. In 1986, the SHR included data on 19,257 of the 20,613 homicides (about 93%) estimated by the FBI to have been committed. However, even the 20,613 homicides reported by the UCR is not an absolute count of the crimes reported to police throughout the Nation. Not every jurisdiction submitted complete crime data for the entire year. Some jurisdictions provided incomplete data, and there were jurisdictions that did not submit data to the FBI, or for which the data quality was not at an acceptable level of quality to be used for estimation. The FBI routinely adjusts its estimates for jurisdictions submitting incomplete or missing data, based on past reports from those jurisdictions. Therefore, if the under-representation in the SHR was evenly distributed across the year, the 1,938 murder, non-negligent manslaughter and negligent manslaughter victims in the SHR should have represented somewhat less than the actual number of victims of such crimes that occurred during July, 1986.

Table 2 displays by state the numbers of homicide victims within each file. Of particular note are the 16 UCR-SHR homicide cases for Pennsylvania, compared to 66 death certificates for the state. The SHR file count was so low because no July homicides committed in Philadelphia were present in the SHR file.

The death certificate cases were matched with SHR cases using victim age, race, sex and ethnicity, weapon used or means of death, as well as victim-offender relationship, if available on both the death

Table 2. Homicides during July, 1986 by data source

	<u>Death Certificates</u>	<u>UCR SHR</u>		<u>Death Certificates</u>	<u>UCR SHR</u>
Alabama	53	48	Missouri	52	46
Alaska	3	5	Montana	3	1
Arizona	25	24	Nebraska	5	4
Arkansas	22	21	Nevada	9	7
California	275	292	New Hampshire	1	3
Colorado	24	29	New Mexico	26	20
Connecticut	13	15	New York City	149	151
Delaware	4	3	North Carolina	45	46
Washington, DC	15	13	North Dakota	1	0
Florida	120	134	Ohio	47	54
Georgia	63	50	Oklahoma	35	35
Hawaii	3	2	Oregon	19	23
Idaho	3	4	Pennsylvania	66	16
Illinois	127	122	Rhode Island	2	3
Indiana	33	30	South Carolina	27	27
Iowa	5	5	South Dakota	2	1
Kansas	11	14	Tennessee	49	42
Kentucky	15	26	Texas	222	220
Louisiana	60	46	Utah	8	7
Maine	1	2	Vermont	0	1
Massachusetts	20	17	Washington	19	21
Michigan	105	109	West Virginia	8	5
Minnesota	14	14	Wisconsin	13	11
Mississippi	29	12	Wyoming	4	2
			Total	1855	1783

certificate and SHR file. In a few cases, certificates of victims in multiple homicides could be matched based on date, time and place of injury. Table 3 displays the results of this 1st step match. Figure 3 displays a matched certificate/ SHR case, with the victim's name and case identifiers deleted:

Table 3. Results of initial match of death certificate and SHR July 1986 homicides

Total Death certificate cases	1,855
Total SHR cases	1,783
Matched cases	1,191
Unmatched death certificates	664
Unmatched SHR cases	572

There are a number of reasons why a large number of certificates and SHR cases might not match. First, there were some coding errors in the certificate and SHR files. Six certificates indicated that the deaths were in fact suicides, despite being assigned homicide E codes. Two certificates listed dates of death prior to July 1, 1986, although the file from which they had been drawn had listed them as occurring in July. Records of three SHR victims were determined to duplicate those of three other SHR victim records. One set of duplicates was apparently the result of two jurisdictions submitting data to the FBI for

Match Status: Matched Cert # xxxx UCR ID # XXX

Death Certificate:
Alabama State Record 46 Certificate # xxxx

Place: Mobile Injury place: Restaurant, bar Male
County: Mobile Death place: Crime scene Age 28
Place type: 4 Death cause: Shot Black
Injury date: 07/16/86 Guntype: Handgun Never married
Death date: 07/16/86 Motive: Not given NonHispanic
Date certain Time of injury: 02:00

gsw chest; shot w/ handgun

UCR SHR information:
Alabama Identification number: xxxx

MOBILE Homicide type: Murder, NonNeg MS

Victim: Age 28 Male Black NonHispanic

Place types I & II: City 100,000-249,000 / City 100,000-249,000

Number of victims: 1 Number of offenders: 1

1st offender: Age 28 Male Black NonHispanic

Weapon: Handgun
Vict 1/Off 1 Rel: Stranger
Circumstance: Other arguments
Subcircumstance: Not justifiable homicide

Figure 3 Example of a matched death certificate/SHR case

the same case. The other sets of duplicates resulted from submission of multiple victim records for each victim in a two victim homicide.

Another problem encountered in the matching process is that in large cities, there were often a number of victims in the SHR file with identical age, race, and sex and method of death entries. Without more information from police departments, insufficient information was available to differentiate among the cases and assign them to the appropriate death certificate.

In addition, on some cases that otherwise matched one or more variables had different values on the death certificates and SHR files. This was especially true for victim age. Most often the age discrepancy was only one or two years, but as table 4 shows, there were some cases for which the age discrepancy was greater. The greatest age discrepancy for a matched case in which both systems had an entry for age was 15 years. This case was considered a match despite the age discrepancy because the victim was a white female who was beaten to death in a city with only 3 homicides during the month.

Another source of difference between the two systems relates to date of death. While the certificate file consisted of homicide victims who died during July, some victims were actually attacked prior to July 1. While the longest time period between attack and death was 10 years, most such prior attacks took place in May and June, 1986. It is unclear how such cases were handled in the SHR.

Moreover, homicides that occurred late in July were possibly not entered into the SHR system until the following month. It is possible that these cases may have been coded as having occurred in the month they were entered into the system. If so, and there is evidence to support this hypothesis, this could account for a significant proportion of the non-matching cases. In the long run such temporal shifting towards future months would have small net effect, so that homicides shifted from 1985 to 1986 would be offset by those shifted from 1986 to 1987. However, because the study concentrated on a one month period, and because it attempted to match records based on the actual dates of death, for this study the net result would be unmatched certificates for those SHR cases shifted into a future month, and unmatched SHR cases for those shifted into July from an earlier month.

In addition, some homicide victims were transported from the jurisdiction in which they were attacked to a hospital in another jurisdiction. Five homicide victims crossed state lines before they died. Thus, the death certificate came from the jurisdiction of death, while the SHR case came from the jurisdiction of attack. All five of these cases were matched.

Finally, and importantly, differences between the cases in the files are to a great degree the result of differences in the two programs' purposes and procedures. Basically the UCR measures crimes, of which death is one outcome. The Mortality System, measures deaths, of which crime is one cause.

The UCR is a voluntary program in which law enforcement agencies throughout the United States submit, on a regular basis, counts of specific crimes that are reported or come to police attention in their jurisdictions. While the FBI makes some attempt to monitor and edit submissions from the jurisdictions, it cannot enforce participation or quality control measures to guarantee that the information submitted is complete and accurate.

Participation in the UCR program has increased over the years, so that in 1990, law enforcement agencies representing 96 percent of the Nation's population were active in the UCR program. Not every agency submitting crime information submitted complete data for the entire year, however, so the actual crime coverage was somewhat lower.

The NCHS Mortality System compiles mortality data derived from death certificates submitted by the States. The cause of all deaths are coded according to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). Homicides, defined in the ICD as "injuries inflicted by another person with intent to injure or kill by any means" are among the cause of death codes available in the system. (In addition, the ICD recognizes

Table 4. Death certificates and SHR matched cases; victim age compared

Total matching cases	1,191	100.0%
Certificates/SHR agree	935	78.5%
Certificates/SHR differ	256	21.5
1 year difference	184	15.4
2 years difference	29	2.4
3 year difference	13	1.1
4 or 5 year difference	10	0.8
6 or more year difference	10	0.8
Certificate or SHR Victim Age NA	10	0.8

death by legal intervention, roughly equivalent to justifiable homicide). It should be noted that typically, physicians or coroners, in certifying homicide as the cause of death are using their professional judgement to do so rather than making a legal decision. NCHS data include information about the deceased and specific cause of death, but do not include any information about the offender or circumstances.

Cases in which the cause of death could not be determined or were under investigation were classified as pending or undetermined. These cases are reclassified if and when the cause of death is finally determined. In other words, some cases existed in only one of the two files because either the death was not classified as a homicide by the time the case was transmitted to NCHS, or for some reason the case was never transmitted to the FBI.

Current status of the study

Currently, data are being collected from police departments about the results of their investigations of the death certificate identified homicides. Figure 4 displays information being requested for each case from police departments. In order to minimize burden on the agencies, a minimum of information is being requested about each case.

Data elements collected from police departments	
Homicide date	
Cause of death	
Number arrested	
Offender name*	
Offender demographics*	
Relationship to victim*	
Arrest date*	
Arrest charge*	
Weapon used*	
Convicted?*	
Offender drug/alcohol use*	
Circumstance(s)/Motive(s)	
Victim drug/alcohol use	
If no arrest: status of case	
Textual description of incident and investigation status	
*collected for each person arrested	

Figure 4

Unfortunately, this process has been much more labor intensive and time consuming than originally anticipated. At present, police investigation information has been obtained for about 350 cases, with information pending for an additional 150 cases. As police data are received, previously matched murders are reviewed to ensure that the correct cases have been matched. In addition, the police investigation information about the case often enables matching previously unmatched cases.

Data for Chicago, the largest city for which investigation data has been obtained to date, provide an

example of the effect that having additional information about each homicide has on the matching of homicide cases. These data were provided by the Illinois Criminal Justice Authority from their Chicago Homicide Project (CHP). The CHP is a compilation of police data for all Chicago homicides from 1965 through the present. Chicago data provides a good example of the matching process and the differences between each data system.

Table 5 displays the number of cases from each system, and the results of the matching operation. There were 99 homicide death certificates for Chicago for July, 1986 and 99 cases on the SHR for Chicago.

That the number of cases in each system was identical is purely coincidental. The homicide project had 93 cases for that month. Prior to receiving the homicide project police investigation data, 57 certificate and SHR cases matched. With the homicide project data, an additional 21 cases were matched, so that 78 death certificates matched SHR cases. Seventy-four cases matched across all three systems. However, there remained 7 unmatched certificates, 19 SHR cases and 3 homicide project cases that did not match. There were a few two way matches; 4 cert/SHR, 14 cert/homicide project and 2 SHR/homicide project cases. Discussions will be held with the Illinois Criminal Justice Authority to determine, to the extent possible, the reasons for differences among the systems.

Table 5. Chicago homicide cases, July, 1986; Results of matches across data systems

1. Initial match between death certificates and SHR

Certificates	99
UCR-SHR	99
Matching	57
Non-matching	42

2. Match after reviewing Chicago Homicide Project (CHP) data

CHP cases	93
3 way match	74
Cert/SHR match	4
Cert/CHP match	14
SHR/CHP match	2
unmatched certs	7
unmatched SHR	19
unmatched CHP	3

Conclusions

An expanding body of criminological literature recognizes the diverse nature of events culminating in what is commonly known as homicide. Because homicide is increasingly understood to encompass a wide variety of acts united primarily by outcome, creating effective programs to prevent homicide requires an understanding of the various underlying homicide syndromes. This understanding can only be achieved if the information acquired about homicide is sufficient to categorize the events completely and accurately.

The UCR and NCHS's Mortality System were not designed to enable and support detailed investigations into the causes and correlates of homicide. Homicide researchers wishing to utilize these programs are often hampered by problems associated with missing data and a lack of explanatory variables.

The Study of Homicide Casflow is an initial attempt to do on the national level what a number of researchers have accomplished on a local level; create a comprehensive homicide dataset that enables exploration of the characteristics and correlates of the crime. It is clear that national homicide data must be improved in order to provide researchers with information adequate to deal with one of the terribly serious and complex crime problems that confront our society.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Information about these projects may be obtained from the respective principal investigators:

Chicago Homicide Project
Carolyn Rebecca Block
Statistical Analysis Center
Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
120 South Riverside Place
Chicago, Illinois 60606

St. Louis Homicide Project
Scott Decker or Richard Rosenfeld
Criminology and Criminal Justice
University of Missouri-St. Louis
8001 Natural Bridge Road
St. Louis, Missouri 63121

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