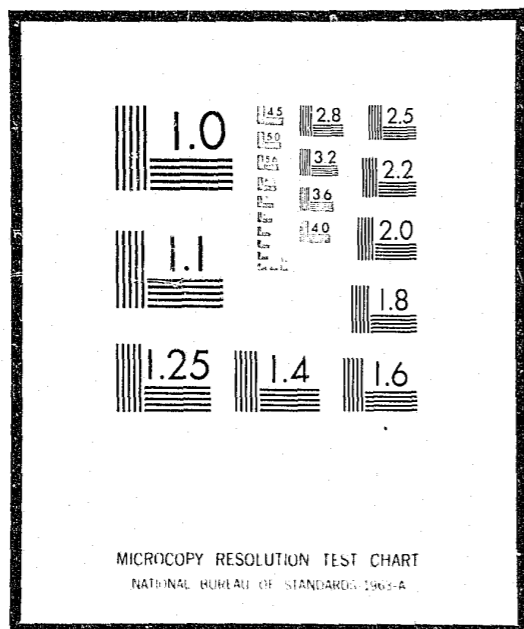


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Special Project Series

PEACE OFFICER INVOLVED HOMICIDES IN CALIFORNIA 1971-1972

8786

REPORT

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Bureau of Criminal Statistics
PEACE OFFICER INVOLVED HOMICIDES IN CALIFORNIA
1971-1972

PEACE OFFICER INVOLVED HOMICIDES IN CALIFORNIA, 1971-1972

This research effort was undertaken at the behest of State Senator Arlen Gregorio, chairman of a legislative committee examining the use of deadly force in law enforcement.

Data in the study were gathered from police summary reports, the files of the Vital Statistics Section of the Department of Public Health and a newspaper clipping service.

HOMICIDES OF PEACE OFFICERS

Twenty peace officers were slain by criminal offenders during the two-year span of the study - 14 in 1971 and six in 1972. An extended discussion of these killings is available in a Bureau publication, "Homicide in California, 1971-1972." A brief summary of the findings shows that 19 of the 20 were white, 13 were under 35 years of age and that all were shot to death. Handguns were used in 12 of the cases.

HOMICIDES BY POLICE OFFICERS

Table 1 details the distribution of 169 deaths of persons slain by peace officers in 1971 and 1972. The study unit is the county; in cases in which half or more of the deaths are traceable to one specific agency within the county, statistics for the agency are shown in parentheses.

The counties on the list, with the exception of Marin, Kings, Santa Cruz and Humboldt, all contain 250,000 or more inhabitants; Fresno County is the only county with a population of over 250,000 not represented.

The Southern California counties generated 66.3 percent of police-related killings and 62.9 percent of felony crimes; equivalent figures for the San Francisco Bay Area were 14.8 and 23.0, respectively. These comparisons were made by aggregating the homicides in Southern California counties and in the San Francisco Bay Area, and comparing them with the corresponding totals of felony crimes reported in the two regions. Consolidated figures were used to avoid the distortions which can arise from the employment of small numerical bases.

Table 2 depicts the difficulties encountered in obtaining an accurate body of subject matter for the study. The first column contains cases (55) which were reported in both the police summaries and the vital statistics and which were attributed to enforcement action. The next column embraces incidents missing from the police summaries, but present in the vital statistics file, and correctly ascribed to police operations (28). The third heading describes cases (68) found in both sources but not identified as police-caused in the vital statistics material.

Thus, about 73 percent of the cases are found in both files, but only 33 percent are correctly labeled as of police origin in both sources.

It can be seen that dependence on a single source would result in a sizable underestimate of the problem. The Bureau of Criminal Statistics has now instituted procedures to insure that as reliable a count as possible will be maintained.

An a priori expectation - that the greatest proportion of police-related homicides arise from assaults on officers - is confirmed by Table 3. Of the 169 reported cases, 118, or approximately 70 percent, originated in this fashion. Somewhat surprising is the fact that the largest percentage of such assaults were provoked by misdemeanor investigations.

Fatal confrontations between officers and suspects occur most frequently as a result of patrol activities (Table 4). This circumstance accounts for 75 percent of such incidents; detective operations produce the only other sizable proportion of cases - 15 percent.

Table 5 shows that suspect deaths increase during the hours of darkness. From the daily low point of 5.3 percent in the afternoon, they rise to 11.2 percent during the three hour period ending at 3 p.m. to 17.8 percent at 9 p.m. to 20.1 at midnight to the peak 21.9 percent at 3 a.m.

Table 6 points to outside areas as the most common scene of fatal incidents. Over one-third of the total slayings occur out-of-doors, presumably in the course of the commission of a crime. One-fifth of the homicides take place in the victim's residence, suggesting family quarrels as the source.

The distribution of handguns in Table 7 probably reflects the numbers of different caliber weapons carried by officers rather than preferences by police function.

About 44 percent of those killed had only one wound, which for the most part were inflicted by revolvers. The two and three wound categories include approximately 24 percent of the cases, also largely traceable to handguns. It thus appears that such weapons typically produce between one and three wounds.

Table 9 shows that no legal actions resulted from 82.2 percent of the incidents. The only substantial body of actions were civil suits, which were filed in 13 percent of the cases.

TABLE 1
JURISDICTION OF NON PEACE OFFICER HOMICIDES

Reporting unit	Total		1971		1972	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	169	100.0	93	100.0	76	100.0
Los Angeles County	101	59.8	56	60.2	45	59.3
Los Angeles Police Department	(53)	(31.4)	(30)	(32.3)	(23)	(30.3)
Orange County	5	2.9	4	4.3	1	1.3
Riverside County	4	2.4	2	2.1	2	2.6
San Bernardino County	3	1.8	1	1.1	2	2.6
San Diego County	8	4.7	5	5.4	3	4.0
San Diego Police Department	(6)	(3.6)	(4)	(4.3)	(2)	(2.6)
Ventura County	1	0.6	1	1.1	-	-
Alameda County	5	2.9	3	3.2	2	2.6
Oakland Police Department	(3)	(1.8)	(2)	(2.1)	-	-
San Francisco County	7	4.1	4	4.3	3	4.0
Santa Clara County	5	2.9	4	4.3	1	1.3
San Jose Police Department	(4)	(2.4)	(4)	(4.3)	-	-
Contra Costa County	4	2.4	3	3.2	1	1.3
Pleasant Hill Police Department	(2)	(1.2)	(2)	(2.1)	-	-
Marin County	1	0.6	-	-	1	1.3
San Mateo County	3	1.8	1	1.1	2	2.6
Kern County	2	1.2	1	1.1	1	1.3
Kings County	2	1.2	1	1.1	1	1.3
San Joaquin County	2	1.2	1	1.1	1	1.3
Sacramento County	10	5.9	4	4.3	6	8.0
Sacramento Police Department	(6)	(3.6)	(3)	(3.2)	(3)	(4.0)
Monterey County	2	1.2	-	-	2	2.6
Salinas Police Department	(2)	(1.2)	-	-	(2)	(2.6)
Santa Cruz County	2	1.2	2	2.1	-	-
Capitola Police Department	(2)	(1.2)	-	-	-	-
Humboldt County	2	1.2	-	-	2	2.6

TABLE 2

DOCUMENTS AND SOURCE OF REPORTING

Year	Total	+SUM. +V.S. (P.O.)	-SUM. +V.S. (P.O.)	+SUM. +V.S. (not P.O.)	+SUM. -V.S.	-SUM. +V.S. (not P.O.)	+SUM. +V.S. (not P.O.) ^a	+SUM. +V.S. (not P.O.) ^b
Total	169	55	28	68	2	14	1	1
1971	93	40	20	28	2	3	-	-
1972	76	15	8	40	-	11	1	1
Percent of Σ . . .	100.0	32.5	16.6	40.2	1.2	8.3	0.6	0.6

Note: SUM. = Police Summary Report.

V.S. = Department of Public Health, Vital Statistics File.

+ = Included in.

- = Not included in.

P.O. = Caused by police officer.

^aReported three different times.

^bReported January 1973.

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TABLE 3

CLASSIFICATION OF OFFENSE AND TRIGGERING EVENT

Police activity	Total		Assault on peace officer		Assault on private person		Appeared armed		Attempted escape or resisted		Other	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	169	100.0	118	100.0	3	-	9	-	36	100.0	3	-
Felony investigation	62	36.7	38	32.2	3	-	4	-	17	47.2	-	-
Misdemeanor investigation	52	30.8	46	39.0	-	-	1	-	3	8.3	2	-
Service of warrant	4	2.4	2	1.7	-	-	1	-	1	2.8	-	-
Narcotic investigation	13	7.7	6	5.1	-	-	3	-	4	11.1	-	-
Traffic stop	8	4.7	4	3.4	-	-	-	-	4	11.1	-	-
Suspicious person	28	16.5	21	17.8	-	-	-	-	6	16.7	1	-
Other	2	1.2	1	0.8	-	-	-	-	1	2.8	-	-

TABLE 4
PEACE OFFICERS' ASSIGNMENT

Year	Total		Patrol		Traffic		Detective		Station jail		Off duty		Off duty security detail		Reserve		Federal narcotic		State narcotic	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	169	100.0	127	75.1	2	1.2	25	14.8	2	1.2	7	4.1	2	1.2	1	0.6	2	1.2	1	0.6
1971	93	55.0	73	43.2	1	0.6	12	7.1	2	1.2	3	1.7	-	-	-	-	1	0.6	1	0.6
1972	76	45.0	54	31.9	1	0.6	13	7.7	-	-	4	2.4	2	1.2	1	0.6	1	0.6	-	-

TABLE 5
HOUR OF DEATH

Year	Total		12:01-3 a.m.		3:01-6 a.m.		6:01-9 a.m.		9:01-12 noon		12:01-3 p.m.		3:01-6 p.m.		6:01-9 p.m.		9:01-12 midnight	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	169	100.0	37	21.9	22	13.0	7	4.2	11	6.5	9	5.3	19	11.2	30	17.8	34	20.1
1971	93	55.0	24	14.2	14	8.3	4	2.4	8	4.7	2	1.2	8	4.7	15	8.9	18	10.6
1972	76	45.0	13	7.7	8	4.7	3	1.8	3	1.8	7	4.1	11	6.5	15	8.9	16	9.5

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TABLE 8
NUMBER OF SHOTS FIRED BY PEACE OFFICER

Year	Total		None		One		Two		Three		Four		Five		Six		Seven		Eight		Nine or more		Unknown	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	169	100.0	2	1.2	56	33.1	23	13.6	17	10.0	15	8.9	10	5.9	12	7.1	4	2.4	2	1.2	26	15.4	2	1.2
1971	93	55.0	2	1.2	30	17.7	16	9.5	8	4.7	6	3.6	5	2.9	9	5.3	3	1.8	1	0.6	11	6.5	2	1.2
1972	76	45.0	-	-	26	15.4	7	4.1	9	5.3	9	5.3	5	3.0	3	1.8	1	0.6	1	0.6	15	8.9	-	-

TABLE 9
LEGAL ACTIONS AGAINST OFFICER OR AGENCY

Year	Total		None		Claim filed		Criminal suit		Civil suit		Criminal and civil suit	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total . .	169	100.0	139	82.2	3	1.8	2	1.2	22	13.0	3	1.8
1971 . .	93	55.0	79	46.7	1	0.6	1	0.6	12	7.1	-	-
1972 . .	76	45.0	60	35.5	2	1.2	1	0.6	10	5.9	3	1.8