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MURDER IN SPACE CITY: HOUSTON HOMICIDE RE-EXAMINED

FINAL REPORT & PROJECT SUMMARY

NIJ RESEARCH GRANT #7-IJ- CX-0014

JULY 12, 2000

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FINAL PROJECT REPORT

ABSTRACT

As a contribution to nationwide efforts to more thoroughly understand urban violence, the objectives of this research were to: 1) determine changes in the volume and characteristics of homicide from the 1960s to the 1990s in Houston, Texas, 2) compare neighborhood level factors influencing homicide victimization and offending, and 3) document and compare clearance (by arrest) rates as well as final legal disposition of homicide cases over time. Results of each of these three steps were to then be compared with findings of researchers currently examining similar data for other US cities.

Data were collected, by permission from Houston Police Chief Sam Nuchia on all Houston homicide cases recorded in the Police Murder Logs for 1984-1994; 1984 being the first year for which murder log data were computerized. 5,442 homicides were on record for this time period. This allowed for a comparison of homicide profiles for 1945-1949 (Bullock 1955), 1955-1961 (Porkorny 1965) and 1969 (Lundsgaarde 1977), as described in these earlier works. The project included a quantitative analysis of the age, sex and race of victims and offenders, as well as a description of homicide circumstance, victim-offender relationship, type of weapon used and any drug- or gang-related activity involved. Though not part of the original research plan, these files were augmented with incident information extracted from the homicide news report files of the *Houston Chronicle* for the period under investigation.

A second major thrust of this project was to establish any significant relationships between the criminal justice system's response to homicide, by examining both clearance (by arrest) rates and the final legal disposition of cases, based upon characteristics of the homicide incident and/or persons involved. This was to be accomplished by comparing case dispositions of 1969 homicide (n=200) with a random sample of ten percent of the 1980 homicide cases (n=200) and ten percent of the 1990 cases (n=200). The clearance analysis proved feasible with available data. In lieu of the legal disposition component of the analysis (for which data access proved pragmatically unwieldy), substantially expanded analyses were conducted on the gender-specific aspects of Houston homicide, particularly related to intimate partner incidents.

This research was intended to establish Houston as yet another city for the comparison of findings regarding lethal violence among urban areas of the US. Specifically, this would enhance the current (and ongoing) research efforts in Chicago, Philadelphia, Phoenix and St. Louis, by adding a city representative of the Southern geographic region. This has proven to be the case.

OPERATIONAL PLAN

A number of factors since earlier analyses of Houston homicide (Bullock Pokorny Lundsgaarde 1969) led to the interest in a replication and enhancement of their work. These factors included: (1) the city experienced a severe economic downturn during the late 1970's and much of the 1980's; (2) whereas the city's minority population in the 1960s was primarily African American, it is now comprised of large proportions of Hispanic and Asian residents as well; (3) the demographic (particularly racial) makeup of the city's police force is now more diverse; (4) presently, illegal drugs are a major dynamic in American violence as both situational and motivational factors in many homicide incidents; (5) anti-drug laws enacted since the 1970s may alter the traditional criminal justice response to homicide, where drug possession or sale is a factor, (6) largely as a result of criminal drug activity, firearms are now in large supply; and (7) gang-related homicide accounts for an ever-larger proportion of total homicide incidents.

DEFINITIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Given the economic, political and demographic variations within Houston over the past twenty years, one may appropriately ask whether the cultural dynamics which appear to have so strongly influenced formal criminal justice responses to homicide in 1969 remain intact -- or have likewise become less predictable. The proposed project is primarily intended to answer this question.

Another major objective of the proposed research is to sort and chart the profile of Houston homicide for the past decade, to be modeled after the homicide information now being collected for other major US cities (e.g., Chicago, St. Louis, Philadelphia and Phoenix). By compiling detailed information regarding the trend and patterns of lethal violence in Houston, yet another geographic region of the country (South) will be represented among current urban analyses. Specifically, this means simultaneously examining the intersection of age, gender, and race of both homicide victim and offender, the victim-offender relationship, circumstance and (intra-city) geographic location of these crimes, as well as the role of weapons, drugs and gangs in their occurrence. While the basic "homicide facts" already exist within the files of most police jurisdictions, including Houston, they are not compiled and analyzed in the level of detail just described. Such information will be useful to policy-makers, law enforcement officials and academicians. Also, this research will enhance the work of the National Institute of Justice "Intramural Research on Violence in US Cities," wherein homicide in eight major urban areas is being studies. Although Houston was omitted from the initial research sites for that project, based upon its non-significant increase or decrease in homicides in recent years, the city remains among urban areas of the US with a homicide rate almost sixty percent above the median (15.8 v 26.6) for the period of 1985 to 1994.

METHODS

Two sources of data were used for this project: (1) HPD computerized homicide data for 1984-1994; and (2) Houston Chronicle computerized news files for all homicide incidents occurring between 1984 and 1994. Though the project originally included collection of all court records for a random sample of homicides in 1980 and 1990, this proved to be pragmatically unwieldy. Alternatively, extensive additional analyses of gender-specific aspects of Houston homicide were performed.

Houston Police Department Computerized Files.

The HPD has already provided data from all homicides (N = 5,442) that were investigated from 1984 to 1994. The raw data has been transformed into SPSS system files. These data include information on motive, relationship between victim and offender, location of offense, case status (e.g., cleared by arrest, open, etc.), date of offense, type of weapon used, and name, race, gender, and age of the victim and offender (if known).

Houston Chronicle News Files.

In order to augment the police murder log data with additional details of these incidents, we also collected information from an electronic database provided by the *Houston Chronicle* of all newspaper stories of lethal violence for the years 1985-1994 (*Houston Chronicle* 1996). This proved particularly useful in our analyses of youth- and gang-related homicide.

Chicago Homicide, 1965-1995.

This publicly available data set, available via the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, was used to compare spousal sex ratios of killing between Chicago and Houston.

PLAN OF ANALYSIS

Four analyses were conducted using data collected via funds from this NIJ grant:

- We examined changes in the volume and characteristics of the homicide rates in Houston over the second half of the twentieth century. This included an analysis of changes of the racial/ethnic distribution of homicide over time. These are reported using descriptive statistics, using SPSS.
- We analyzed homicide clearance by the police, using logistic regression estimates, via SPSS.
- 3) Youth- and adult-perpetrated homicide was compared, with an emphasis on gang-related incidents. These incidents were both described statistically and plotted spatially using ArcView software.
- 4) A descriptive analysis has been conducted of the spousal sex ratios of killing, comparing those of Houston and Chicago, based upon several characteristics (e.g. race, age) of persons involved.

Results of all analyses have been reported to the Houston Police Department, via face-to-face meetings with Capt. R. Holland, head of the HPD Homicide Division. In addition, results of this study have been, and will continue to be, put forth to the academic and public policy community, via the Homicide Research Working Group and other criminology/criminal justice professional conferences. See Project Summary for publications to date.

REFERENCES

- Bullock, Henry A. 1955. "Urban Homicide in Theory and Fact." Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science 45:565-575.
- Lundsgaarde, Henry P. 1977. Murder in Space City: A Cultural Analysis of Houston Homicide Patterns. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pokorny, A.D. 1965. "A Comparison of Homicide in Two Cities." Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science 56:479-87.

PROJECT SUMMARY

To summarize the results of this NIJ-funded project, we offer the abstracts of five papers that have been produced to date. These include a forthcoming book chapter, two published articles in refereed journals and one article currently under review. In addition to the specific citations and abstracts of each of these analyses, (most of) the accompanying exhibits for each paper are included in this document..

1.
Brewer, Victoria E. and Kelly R. Damphousse. 2000. "Racial and Ethnic Factors in a Half-Century of Homicide: Houston, 1945-1995." In Darnell F. Hawkins (Ed.), Interpersonal Violence: The Ethnicity, Race, and Class Nexus. New York: Oxford University Press. Forthcoming.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a review of findings from earlier studies of racial and ethnic differences in homicide at the city level. We then discuss racial and ethnic representation among Houston's homicides over the past 50 years and the role of the economy during each period. The chapter concludes with a discussion of questions that remain unanswered that may generate future research into the urban phenomenon of lethal violence.

See Tables 1 & 2.

1945-49 (Bullock)	1958-61 (Pokorny)	1969 (Lundsgaarde)	1985-94 ²
n = 489	n=425	n=268	n=4944
200/	2004	200/	
			20%
			48
9 .	7		30
		-1	3
24%	29%	26%	15%
67	63	66	53
9	8	7	28
	N/a		2
	*-		2
4%	7%	6%	17%
	N/a	3%	7%
42%	N/a	94%	> or = 75%
24	N/a	1	> or = 25
(< 5 th grade)			
19	n/a	73	>51
11	N/a	5	9-15
N/a	64%	86%	70%
	1		23
N/a	11	3	7
			/, , ,
42%	42%	40%	41%
			2
			39
8	18	23	18
N/a	7%	26%	10%
	1		7
,		43	38
N/a	44	4.1	1X
	1	1	n = 489

Numbers may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Offenders race/ethnicity known for 78% of cases.

Table 2 - Numbers and Mean Rates¹ per 100,000 Population, Victims in Criminal Homicide, Houston, by Race and Ethnicity

	Overall		Non-His	panic Whites	В	lacks	His	panics	A	sians
	Pop.	Hom. Rate	% Pop.	Hom. Rate	% Pop.	Hom. Rate	% Pop.	Hom. Rate	% Pop.	Hom. Rate
1945-49 (Bullock)										
(n=489)	490,339	23	74	7	21	64	5	35	n/a	n/a
1958-61 (Pokorny)										<u> </u>
(n=425)	938,219	12	67	6	18	32	15	12	n/a	n/a
1969 (Lundsgaarde)										
$(n=268)^2$	1,232,802	23	59	9	25	45	16	8	-1	6
1985-89³										
(n=2234)	1,809,013	28	47	10	27	47	23	48	3.5	31
1990-944										
(n=2710)	1,630,553	33	41	15	27	58	28	33	4	24
				<u> </u>	L					

Rates are rounded.

² Estimates based on the 216 or 268 homicide incidents for which victim race/ethnicity identified.

³ Based on 1985 population estimates, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

⁴ Based on 1990 population estimates, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Brewer, Victoria E., and William G. Edison, Jr. "Factors Affecting Urban Homicide Clearance: The Case of Houston, 1985-1994." *Under review*.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the factors affecting homicide clearance rates in a large urban area. By analyzing the police records for 4,900 homicides for 1985-1994 in Houston, Texas, we identify factors that either increase or decrease the probability of a homicide clearance. Important predictors of case clearance include race/ethnicity of offender, victim-offender relationship and whether the incident involved multiple offenders. We suggest that considerations other than clearance rates must be considered in evaluating the effectiveness of the system of justice.

See Tables 1 & 2.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Variables in Regression Analyses

	Variable	Mean	(s.d.)
(A)	Dependent Variable		
	Cleared	.710	.45
(B)	Independent Variables		
	Drug-related	.002	.14
	Gang-related	.008	.01
	Felony-related	.137	.34
	Handgun	.570	.49
	Multiple Offender	.100	.31
	Multiple Victim	.007	.27
	Victim-Offender Relationship Cod	le 3.549	1.26
	Victim Age	29.390	12.03
	Male Victim	.830	.38
	Victim Race/Ethnicity		
	White	.200	.40
	Black	.480	.50
	Hispanic	.290	.46
	Asian/Other	.003	.16
	Offender Age	31.830	13.50
	Male Offender	.710	.46
	Offender Race/Ethnicity		
	White	.120	.32
	Black	.430	.49
	Hispanic	.220	.42
	Asian/Other	.001	.19
	Incident Location Code	3.370	2.11

Table 2. Logistic Regression Coefficients for Effect of Homicide Characteristics on Log Odds of Case Clearance; Houston, 1985-1994 (N=4,944).

	(N=4,944).	
Characteristic	В	S.E.
Motive		
Drug-related	1436	.3958
Gang-related	4102	.7159
Felony-related	4.0726	18.3370
(Reference Category:		
all other motives)		
Handgun	0126	.1307
Location		
Bar	.1251	.2823
Business	1126	.4737
Street/Park	.2227	.3131
Field/Warehouse	3647	.2756
Other	.0366	.3593
(Ref.Category:Residence)		
Multiple Offenders	.7723**	.2264
Multiple Victims	.2230	.2590
Vic-Off Relationship		
Family	1.4651***	.4124
Friend/Acquaintance	.7526	.4006
Stranger	.1597	.2165
Unknown	8285***	.2304
(Ref. Category:Intimate)		
Offender Age Category		
15-19	1.2062	.8983
20-29	.1564	.2466
30-39	.0625	.2197
40-55	.1478	.2474
+55	.5345	.3505
(Ref. Category: -15)		
Male Offender	.0934	.3588
Offender Race/Ethnicity		
Black	1.4120***	.2866
Hispanic	.5627*	.2218
Asian/Other	.9569***	.2464
(Ref. Category: White)		
Victim Age Category	2000	41.63
15-19	.3202	.4163
20-29	.2164	
30-39	. 0422	.1326
40-55 +55	2821 1261	.1412
(Ref. Category: -15)	1201	.1003
Male Victim	1954	.1881
Victim Race/Ethnicity	- · 1332	. 1001
Black	.4915	.4188
Hispanic	.6446	.4169
Asian/Other	.2978	.4179
(Ref. Category: White)	.27,0	
Constant	1.7388	1.9931
COMBERNIC	2.7300	
* p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001		
P		

3.
Brewer, Victoria E., Kelly R. Damphousse, and Cary D. Adkinson. 1998. "The Role of Juveniles in Urban Homicide: The Case of Houston, 1990-1994." *Homicide Studies* Vol. 2, No.3 (August):321-339.

ABSTRACT

Youthful homicide offending is now regarded as a threat to society at large and inner cities in particular. A leading explanation focuses on gangs, drugs, and guns as the "nexus" of contemporary youth violence. This study profiles juvenile homicide in one of the nation's largest cities, Houston, Texas for the period of 1990 to 1994. Following Marvin Wolfgang's precedent, the authors summarize these homicide data in terms of demographic characteristics and victim-offender relationships. They then address the spatial distribution of lethal incidents. The authors find that gang-related killing is a relatively small proportion of all juvenile homicide offending. Also, juveniles are more likely than adults to use firearms, commit homicide in public and outdoor locations, and engage in lethal violence in relation to other felony offending. The authors conclude with a discussion of criminal justice responses to juvenile violence.

TABLE 1.

MEAN ANNUAL RATES PER 100,000 POPULATION, CRIMINAL HOMICIDE VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS, BY RACE/ETHNICITY,* AND AGE, HOUSTON, 1990 - 1994 (n=2,701).

	All Races/ Ethnicities	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Other
Victims					
Overall	33.3	15.3	55.5	33.4	22.4
Adults	43.6	19.8	72.3	47.3	27.1
Juveniles	9.5	3.0	18.0	8.4	9.8
Offenders	;				
Overall	31.9	8.4	49.8	24.6	32.2
Adults	42.7	10.7	65.2	33.9	42.2
Juveniles	10.4	2.3	15.5	8.0	5.5

^{*}Race/ethnicity-specific rates for adult victims and offenders calculated for the 78% of cases where known. Race/ethnicity identified for all juvenile victims and offenders.

FIGURE 1. THE SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF JUVENILE HOMICIDE OFFENDING, HOUSTON, 1991 (N=64).

See journal article, as cited above.

TABLE 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF JUVENILE AND ADULT HOMICIDE INCIDENTS,1 HOUSTON, 1990-1994 (Percent)²

Characteristics	Juvenile Offenders (-18 years old) (n=259)	Adult Offenders (+17 years old) (n=1601)
Offender		
Mean age	16	29
Offender younger than age 14	14.7	n/a
Male	96.9	89.6
White	9.7	13.9
African-American	53.1	55.2
Hispanic	30.9	25.8
Asian/Other	6.3	2.8
Victim		
Mean age	26	31
Male	74.3	84.4
White	11.3	20.3
African-American	55.9	48.7
Hispanic	29.0	28.2
Asian/Other	3.8	2.8
Asiail/Other		
Juvenile Victims	28.5	7.2
Intraracial	72.6	79.6
Interracial	27.4	20.4
Multiple Victim	7.3	8.6
Multiple Offender	27.4	15.7
Victim-Offender Relationship		
Intimate	1.5	13.9
Family	8.5	7.4
Friend	40.9	39.8
Stranger	33.6	25.2
Other	15.5	13.7
Method		
Handgun	64.1	59.4
Long gun	22.8	12.2
Other	13.1	28.4
Motive ³		
Gang-related	8.5	2.4
Gang-motivated	6.2	1.6
Drug-related	14.2	11.7
Drug-motivated	10.0	9.6
Other motive - Argument	25.7	51.3
Domestic	1.5	6.9
Felony	24.6	12.3
Money argument	3.5	4.1
Retaliation	1.9	2.2
Other	10.4	9.5
Location		
Residence	38.2	44.6
Bar	.8	4.1
Retail	8.1	8.4
Street/alley/lot	45.6	33.5
Other	6.6	9.4
Peak Killing Months	July, August (+11% each)	July, October (+9%

¹Cases with all known relevant victim and offender characteristics, n=1860.

²Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding.

³'Motive' Categories are not mutually exclusive.

4.
Paulsen, Derek J. and Victoria E. Brewer. 2000. "The Spousal Sex Ratio of Killing Revisited: A
Comparison of Houston and Chicago Intimate Partner Homicide." *Gender Issues* Vol.18, No.1:88100.

ABSTRACT

Based on the work of Wilson & Daly (1992) and Gauthier & Bankston (1997), the major objective of the present study was to determine how the spousal sex ratios of killing (SROKs) — the number of female perpetrators for every 100 male perpetrators — compare between two geographically disparate, major U.S. cities — Chicago and Houston. The results of the analysis reported add to our general understanding of the problem, in that the relative proportions of females and males killing intimate partners were similar along at least three important dimensions. The SROKs in both cities were only high for the killing of spouses and children; we did not observe a convergence of SROKs in the killing of other blood relatives, nor acquaintances or strangers. Our analysis also strongly indicates that mens' relative risk of intimate partner homicide victimization in both cities decreases dramatically when the two parties are estranged in some way. Another major finding is that large SROKs observed in the present analysis of Chicago and Houston are largely a Black phenomenon. The lowest SROKs were found for Hispanics, followed by non-Hispanic Whites. The paper concludes with suggestions for further research in this area.

TABLE 1: Number of Spousal Homicides and SROK in Various Homicide Samples

	9	Offender		
Data Set	Man	Woman	<u>SROK</u>	Source
United States 1976-85	10,529	7,888	75	Maxfield(1989)
New S. Wales 1968-86	303	95	31	Daly and Wilson(1992)
Canada 1974-83	812	248	31	Daly and Wilson(1992)
Denmark 1933-61	96	16	17	Siciliano(1965)
England/Wales 1968-86	981	223	23	Daly and Wilson(1992)
Scotland 1979-87	99	40	40	Daly and Wilson(1992)

TABLE 2. Census Characteristics of Chicago and Houston, 1990.

<u>Houston</u>	Chicago
.6 Million	2.7 Million
I th Largest	3 rd Largest
2,900 per square mile	12,200 per square mile
15,000 in 1995(9 th)	30,000 in 1995(4 th)
֡	

TABLE 3. Racial/Ethnic Distribution of Chicago and Houston, 1990.

	Houston	<u>Chicago</u>
White	41%	45%
Black	27	39
Latino	28	12
Other	4	4

TABLE 4: Number of Intimate Partner Homicides and the Spousal Sex Ratio of Killing(SROK)

	Offender		
Data Set	Man	Woman	<u>SROK</u>
Houston 1985-1994	251	191	76
Chicago 1965-1989	844	862	102

^{*} In an analysis limited to an equivalent 5 year period(1985-1989), the respective SROKs are 76 for Houston and 117 for Chicago.

TABLE 5: Number of Intimate Partner Homicides and SROK for Cases Perpetrated by Guns Versus by Other Means

		Offender Offender		Other Cases Offender			
Data Set	Man	Woman	SROK	Man	Woman	SROK	
Houston	168	121	72	81	62	77	
Chicago	465	399	86	379	463	122	

TABLE 6: Number of Homicides Perpetrated by Men Versus Women And the SROK, Contrasting Spousal Versus Other Homicides

	Intimate Partners <u>Offender</u>			Other Hor <u>Offend</u>		
Data Set	Man	Woman	SROK	Man	Woman	SROK
Houston	251	191	76	3,757	244	7
Chicago	844	862	102	11,589	1,246	11

TABLE 7: The SROK and Number of Homicides, by Victim-Offender Relationships

	Houston Offender	Chicago <u>Offender</u>					
Victim-Offender Relationship	Man	Woma	an SROK	Man	Woman	SROK	
Intimate Partner	251	191	76	844	862	102	
Filicide < 1 year > 1 year	42 18 24	38 13 25	90 72 104	164 73 91	158 94 64	96 129 70	
Blood	225	58	26	410	70	17	
Acquaintance	1,555	104	7	7,063	824	12	
Stranger	860	22	3	3,658	166	5	

TABLE 8: Number of Spousal Homicides and the SROK in Registered Versus De Facto Marital Unions

Registered Marriages

Data Set	Offender Man	Woman	<u>SROK</u>	Offender Man	Woman	SROK
Houston	107	79	74	144	112	78
Chicago	490	426	87	354	436	123

De Facto Marriages

TABLE 9: Number of Spousal Homicides and SROK for Coresiding Versus Estranged Couples in Registered Marriages

Couples Evidently
Coresiding

Couples Living Apart

Data Set		Offender Man	Woman	SROK	Offender Man	Woman	<u>SROK</u>
Houston	*	56	40	71	16	5	31
Chicago		373	374	100	117	52	45

Data about coresidency was only available in 315 of the 442 total spousal homicide cases and 117 of the 186 registered marriage homicides.

TABLE 10: # of Homicides and SROK for Various Homicide Categories, by Offender Race
Houston Chicago

Offender				Offender		
Category	Man	Woman	SROK	Man	Woman	SROK
Black						
Spouse	130	132	102	577	753	131
Other	1,898	170	9	8,715	1,107	13
Registered	43	33	77	309	365	118
DeFacto	87	99	114	268	388	145
Shooting	87	78	90	319	352	110
Other	43	54	126	258	401	155
White						
Spouse	60	38	63	178	76	43
Other	572	49	9	1,222	87	7
Registered	40	30	75	130	46	35
DeFacto	20	8	40	48	30	63
Shooting	40	31	78	94	33	35
Other	20	7	35	84	43	51
Hispanic						
Spouse	55	13	27	76	22	29
Other	1,183	24	2	1,569	39	2
Registered	20	8	40	44	11	25
DeFacto	35	5	14	32	11	34
Shooting	36	12	33	47	12	26
Other	19	1	5	29	10	34

^{*}Insufficient number of spousal and other homicides by "other" ethnic groups to conduct a comparison.

TABLE 11: Number of Homicides and SROK for Coresiding Versus Estranged Couples, by Ethnicity of Killer*

			J STON fender			CAGO Tender	
Race Black		Man	Woman	<u>SROK</u>	Man	Woman	<u>SROK</u>
Diadi	Coreside	19	16	84	238	322	135
	Estranged	6	2	33	71	43	61
White							
	Coreside	22	21	95	99	39	30
	Estranged	7	0	0	31	7	23
Hispan	ic						
•	Coreside	12	3	25	30	9	30
	Estranged	3	3	100	14	2	14

^{*} Data about coresidency was only available in 315 of the 442 total spousal homicide cases.

TABLE 12: 14ean Ages of Husband and Wife and Mean Age Difference(Husband's Age minux Wife's Age) in Female Victim versus Male Victim Spousal Homicides

	Husband Killed Wife	Wife Killed Husband
Data Set	Mean Age	Mean Age
Houston		
Husband's Age	37.3	37.8
Wife's Age	3472	33.9
Age Difference	3.2	3.8
Chicago		
Husband's Age	38.3	38.8
Wife's Age	35.0	34.3
Age Difference	3.3	4.4