

Crime Trend Series

DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL — CRIME PREVENTION AND JUSTICE ASSISTANCE DIVISION

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June 1998

Murder in Hawaii 1992 - 1997

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Although murder occurs in Hawaii at less than half the national rate, this most serious of criminal offenses warrants an ongoing analysis of the available data. Statewide murder statistics for the 1980-1991 period appear in an earlier report published by this office. This report provides a detailed statistical portrait of murders that occurred in the subsequent six-year period.

Report highlights include the following:

- There were 280 murders in the state during the six-year period 1992-1997, ranging from a low of 40 in 1996 to a high of 56 in 1995. On average, there were 46.7 murders per year during the 1992-1997 period. A total of 262 known offenders and at least 39 others who were unidentified at the time the original Uniform Crime Reports were made were involved in these cases.
- Murders typically involved male victims and offenders in their early- to mid-thirties, occurred between people who knew one another but were not related, arose from non-domestic arguments, and involved the use of either firearms or bare hands and feet as murder weapons.
- Gender played a significant role in the Hawaii murders. Compared to female victims, male victims were much more numerous, somewhat younger overall, and more often in the 18-29 year

age group. They were also much more likely to be killed in a non-domestic argument, more apt to be shot to death, and much more likely to be killed by a friend, acquaintance, neighbor, or co-worker. Female victims were comparatively older, more likely to be beaten to death, and were much more often killed in domestic arguments and by those to whom they were romantically related. While male victims outnumbered female victims by almost two-to-one overall, half of child victims were female.

- On average, alleged offenders¹ were slightly younger than victims. Male offenders outnumbered female offenders by almost twelve-to-one, were older, killed children almost 10% of the time, and killed female victims about one-third of time. In contrast, 30% of female offenders killed children and 50% killed other females. There was no strong relationship between offender sex and weapon choice, although females were more likely than males to commit murder with their bare hands and feet.
- Offenders and/or victims were known to have used alcohol and/or other dangerous drugs immediately prior to 44% of the murders.

¹ Although the term *offenders* is used throughout the remainder of this report, it is important to understand that the data herein are based on original police homicide reports, and that the alleged offenders had not been convicted of these crimes at the time the data were collected.

METHOD

This report is based on data from Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) forms the county police departments complete as part of the national Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program. SHRs provide rich additional data not included in the regular monthly statistical report of all serious offenses.

Homicide is comprised of three subcategories: murder, negligent manslaughter, and justifiable homicide. Six negligent manslaughters and seven justifiable homicides posted during the six-year period of this report were excluded from further consideration because the different nature of these offenses would have a confusing effect on the overall statistics.

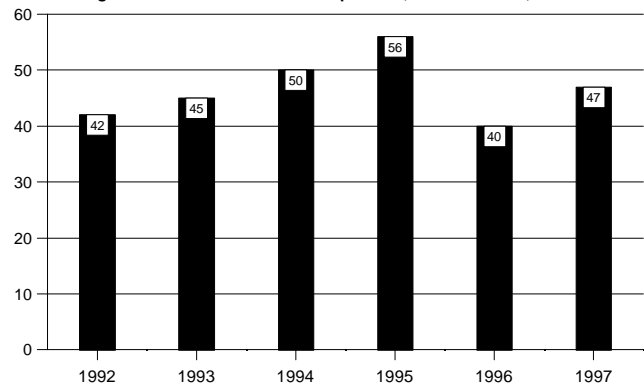
Other special data on murder victims, offenders, and incidents are collected on a separate Homicide Descriptor Guidelines form. This *Crime Trend Series* report is the first publication to present statistics from this source. Included are: a) victim and offender alcohol and drug use immediately prior to the incident; b) whether the offender(s) was determined to have psychological problems and/or attempted or committed suicide at the scene, and c) whether the incident occurred either in prison, or in or near a bar or nightclub. A table presenting the raw data from both forms is available at the Crime Prevention and Justice Assistance Division's Web site (www.cpja.ag.state.hi.us).

All figures have been rounded.

RESULTS

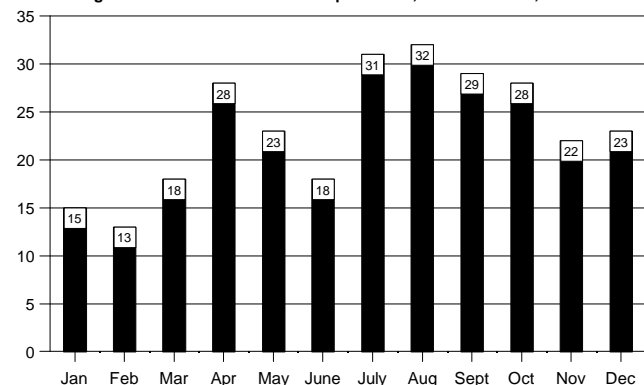
As Figure 1 shows, the annual number of murders in Hawaii during the last six years ranged from a low of 40 in 1996 to a high of 56 in 1995. (It should also be noted that crime in Hawaii reached a 15-year peak in 1995.) With a mean of 46.7 murders statewide per year during the 1992-1997 period, statistics for the most current year, 1997, are on par with the six-year average.

Figure 1: Distribution of Murders per Year, State of Hawaii, 1992-1997



Exactly twice as many murders occurred in the late summer months of the study period than in the first few months of the year (Figure 2). During the six-year period, 92 murders were reported during the months of July through September, while only 46 occurred in the January-March months. There is no clear explanation for this finding.

Figure 2: Distribution of Murders per Month, State of Hawaii, 1992-1997



The six-year distribution of murders across Hawaii's four counties closely follows the state's estimated population distribution from the same time period (Table 1). Murders occurred somewhat more frequently on the Big Island than would be predicted based on population estimates, although the difference was not extreme.

Table 1: Distribution of Murders and Population by County

County	# of Murders	% of Total Murders	% of State Population*
Honolulu	200	71.4	73.9
Hawaii	44	15.7	11.7
Maui	23	8.2	9.7
Kauai	13	4.6	4.7

* Based on an average of annual population estimates for the 1992-1997 period.

There were 280 murders reported during the study period. Males accounted for two-thirds of murder victims and, among 262 known offenders, they outnumbered females by a margin of almost twelve-to-one (Table 2). At least 39 offenders (more if there were cases that involved multiple offenders) were unidentified at the time the original Uniform Crime Reports were issued.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Murder Victims and Offenders

	% Males	% Females
Victims (n = 280)	66.4	33.6
Known Offenders (n = 262)	92.0	8.0

Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 show age and gender data for murder victims and offenders. Well over half the victims were young adults or in their thirties, and were overall a bit older than offenders. There appears to be a strong relationship between victim age and gender; male victims were on average about three years younger than female victims. In contrast, female offenders tended to be somewhat younger than their male counterparts, although the difference was not statistically significant.

Particularly interesting is the disparity between male and female offenders and the age of their victims (Table 6). Victims of female offenders were on average more than seven years younger than victims of male offenders. Still more noteworthy is that 30% of female offenders' victims, as compared to less than 10% of male offenders' victims, were children.

Table 3: Age Distribution of Murder Victims and Offenders

Age Range	% Victims	% Offenders
0-5	5.7	--
6-11	1.4	--
12-17	3.6	9.2
18-29	26.8	42.0
30-39	27.9	21.8
40-49	16.4	16.8
50-59	10.7	5.3
60-69	2.9	4.2
70-89	4.6	0.8
Mean Age	35.1 Years	32.3 Years
Median Age	33.5 Years	29.0 Years

Table 4: Age Distribution of Female and Male Murder Victims

Age Range	% Female Victims	% Male Victims
0 -5	10.6	3.2
6-11	1.1	1.6
12-17	4.3	3.2
18-29	17.0	31.7
30-39	24.5	29.6
40-49	18.1	15.6
50-59	9.6	11.3
60-69	5.3	1.6
70-89	9.6	2.2
Mean Age	37.1 Years	34.1 Years
Median Age	35.5 Years	33.0 Years

p < .01, Lambda = .117 (Victim Gender Dependent)

Table 5: Age Distribution of Female and Male Offenders

Age Range	% Female Offenders	% Male Offenders
0 -5	--	--
6-11	--	--
12-17	14.3	8.7
18-29	52.4	41.1
30-39	9.5	22.8
40-49	9.5	17.4
50-59	9.5	5.0
60-69	4.8	4.1
70-89	--	0.8
Mean Age	29.9 Years	32.5 Years
Median Age	28.0 Years	30.0 Years

Table 6: Victim Age by Offender Sex

Offender Sex	Victim Age (Mean / Median)	% of Victims 0-17 years old
Female	29.1 / 27.5	30.0
Male	36.3 / 35.0	9.2

Alcohol and/or other dangerous drug use was widespread among murder victims and offenders. Substance use of some kind was evident for over a third of offenders, as well as for victims, while substance use by both the victim *and* offender was reported in almost one-fifth of the cases. Even more striking is that substance use by either the offender *or* the victim appeared in 44.3% of the cases.² UCR murder cases in which there is no conclusive evidence of substance use are counted as “no substance use” rather than “unknown.” As a result, the statistics cited in Table 7 almost certainly understate the prevalence of substance use in the Hawaii murders.

²This figure ranged between 50% and 56% from 1992 through 1994, before falling to 41% in 1995, 40% in 1996, and 30% in 1997.

Table 7: Substance Use by Murder Offenders and Victims

Substance	% of Offenders	% of Victims
Alcohol	30.9	27.1
Other drugs	6.9	8.9
Alcohol and/or other drugs	37.4	35.7
Offender and victim used alcohol and/or other drugs	18.9	
Offender or victim used alcohol and/or other drugs	44.3	
Murder occurred at or near a bar or nightclub	5.0	

Almost 80% of the victims knew their killer(s), and in over a quarter of the cases the victim and offender shared either a romantic or familial relationship (Table 8). The most common type of relationship, however, was one in which the victim and offender knew one another but were not directly related— friends, acquaintances, co-workers, and neighbors accounted for the majority of these cases. Only a fifth of the cases involved an offender who was a stranger to the victim.

Table 8: Victim-to-Offender Relationship

Relationship	% of Total
Friend / acquaintance / co-worker / neighbor	53.6
Stranger	20.4
Romantic	16.4
Son or daughter	4.0
Other familial	5.5

As demonstrated in Table 9, female victims were almost eight times more likely than male victims to be killed by someone with whom they had shared a

romantic relationship. Males were twice as likely to be murdered by a friend, acquaintance, co-worker, or neighbor.

Table 9: Victim-to-Offender Relationship by Victim Gender

Relationship	% Female Victims	% Male Victims
Romantic	40.9	5.3
Friend / acquaintance / co-worker / neighbor	31.8	62.5
Stranger	14.8	22.4
Daughter or Son	5.7	3.9
Other familial	6.8	5.9

p < .001, Lambda = .318 (Victim Gender Dependent)

Firearms were the predominant weapon of choice throughout the study period, although more than a quarter of the murders were committed with the use of bare hands and feet. Knives and other sharp instruments, as well as other handheld objects (e.g., rocks and chairs) accounted for most of the remainder of murder weapons (Table 10).

Table 10: Means of Death

Means of Death	% of Total
Firearm	39.1
Strongarm*	25.9
Sharp object	18.7
Other handheld object	9.9
Asphyxiation	4.4
Other**	2.0

* Includes being thrown from heights

** Drugs/poison (x2), motor vehicle (x2), fire, heavy construction equipment

There is a statistically significant relationship between weapon choice and victim gender. Male victims were far more likely than female victims to have been shot to death, while female victims were somewhat more likely than males to have died as a result of strongarm tactics (Table 11). With the exception of the use of knives and other sharp objects, there was a clear disparity between male and female victims and the means of their deaths.

However, there is no statistically significant relationship between weapon choice and the sex of the offender (Table 12). Male and female offenders were about equally disposed to shoot, stab, or asphyxiate their victims, although males were more likely to kill their victims with a miscellaneous object, and females were considerably more prone to murdering their victims with bare hands and feet.

Thus the sex of the offender does not appear to affect weapon choice nearly as much as does the sex of the intended victim; males are most often shot to death, while females are just as apt to be beaten to death as they are to be shot, regardless of the sex of the offenders. Ultimately, of course, the death of the victim not only defines the offense but also renders any distinction in weapon types largely academic.

Table 11: Means of Death by Victim Gender

Means of Death	% Female Victims	% Male Victims
Firearm	29.3	47.8
Strongarm	29.3	17.9
Sharp object	22.8	18.5
Asphyxiation	10.9	1.6
Other handheld object	4.3	12.5
Other	3.3	1.6

p < .001, Lambda = .076 (Victim Gender Dependent)

Table 12: Means of Death by Offender Gender

Means of Death	% Female Offenders	% Male Offenders
Firearm	30.0	36.6
Strongarm	45.0	26.8
Sharp object	20.0	20.5
Asphyxiation	5.0	3.6
Other handheld object	--	10.3
Other	--	2.2

Tables 13 and 14 reveal statistically significant differences between weapon choice and, respectively, victim and offender age ranges. Among victims, murder by firearms use was especially prevalent among 18- to 39-year olds, with strongarm methods claiming the lives of the majority of child victims. Juvenile offenders relied heavily on bare hands and feet, knives, and other handheld objects, while firearms and strongarm methods were used by about an equal proportion of offenders in the young adult age range. The use of cutting instruments and firearms appears a bit more common as offender age increases.

Table 13: Means of Death by Victim Age Range (Percents)

Means of Death	0-5	6-11	12-17	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-89
Fire-arm	12.5	33.3	20.0	66.2	44.7	34.8	30.0	--	15.4
Strong-arm	87.5	--	40.0	8.1	15.8	19.6	23.3	25.0	46.2
Sharp object	--	--	20.0	16.2	23.7	26.1	23.3	25.0	15.4
Asphyx	--	33.3	--	1.4	2.6	6.5	6.7	25.0	15.4
Other hand-held object	--	33.3	20.0	8.1	10.5	10.9	10.0	12.5	7.7
Other	--	--	--	--	2.6	2.2	6.7	12.5	--
Total Count	16	3	10	74	76	46	30	8	13

p < .001, Lambda = .124 (Means of Death Dependent)

Table 14: Means of Death by Offender Age Range (Percents)

Means of Death	12-17	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-89
Fire-arm	4.8	38.4	36.4	37.2	64.3	30.0	50.0
Strong-arm	57.1	33.3	23.6	20.9	--	20.0	--
Sharp object	19.0	17.2	21.8	23.3	21.4	30.0	50.0
Asphyx	--	--	10.9	4.7	7.1	--	--
Other hand-held object	19.0	11.9	7.3	9.3	--	--	--
Other	--	--	--	4.7	7.1	20.0	--
Total Count	21	99	55	43	14	10	2

p < .001, Lambda = .077 (Means of Death Dependent)

By a sizable margin, non-domestic arguments accounted for the largest proportion of murder circumstances, with domestic arguments and murders committed during the course of other crimes a distant second and third, respectively. (Table 15). However, when victim gender is taken into account, the deaths of a comparatively much larger proportion of female victims can be attributed to domestic arguments (Table 16).

Table 17 compares weapon and circumstance data. Firearms use was especially likely in the majority of drug-related murders and in half of all domestic argument murders, while bare hands and feet were the means of death in the vast majority of fatal child abuse cases. Knives and other sharp objects accounted for about a quarter of all deaths resulting from domestic arguments, non-domestic arguments, and the commission of other crimes.

Table 15: Murder Circumstances

Circumstance	% of Total
Non-domestic argument	46.3
Domestic argument	21.3
Committed during the course of another crime	13.1
Drug-related	11.6
Child abuse	6.6
Mercy killing	1.2

Table 16: Victim Gender by Murder Circumstance

Circumstance	% Female Victims	% Male Victims
Domestic argument	43.5	9.4
Non-domestic argument	21.2	59.7
Committed during the course of another crime	18.8	10.1
Child abuse	9.4	5.0
Drug-related	3.5	15.7
Mercy killing	3.5	--

p < .001, Lambda = .294 (Victim Gender Dependent)

Table 17: Means of Death by Murder Circumstance

Circum	Fire-arm	Strong-arm	Sharp object	Asphyx	Other hand-held object	Other
Dom. arg.	50.0	9.6	25.0	5.8	5.8	3.8
Non-dom. arg.	41.6	23.9	23.0	0.9	9.7	0.9
During other crime	32.3	29.0	22.6	9.7	6.5	--
Child abuse	6.7	86.7	--	--	6.7	--
Drug-related	74.1	3.7	7.4	7.4	7.4	--
Mercy killing	--	--	--	33.3	--	66.7

p < .001, Lambda = .102 (Means of Death Dependent)

The Crime Prevention & Justice Assistance Division receives numerous requests for estimates of the proportion of statewide murders that can be attributed to domestic violence. Unequivocal statistics have traditionally been difficult to produce due to the lack of a firm definition of the term “domestic violence” as it applies to UCR murder statistics. The most recently released estimate was based on data through 1996 and placed Hawaii’s domestic violence-related proportion of total murders within a range of 25-30%. All subsequent efforts will employ a working definition of domestic violence-related murder that includes murders resulting from either child abuse or domestic arguments (this definition yielded the 30% estimate, above). Doing so places Hawaii’s current (1997) statistic at 17%, and the 1992-1997 average at 24.3% (Table 18).

As any proportion of domestic violence-related murders will be largely dependent upon the number of *non*-domestic violence-related murders that are committed, a more objective way to compare statistics over time and/or between jurisdictions is to calculate the *rate* of domestic violence-related murders. These data are also included in Table 18.

Table 18: Domestic Violence-Related Murders

Year	Number of domestic violence-related murders	DV-related proportion of total murders (Percent)	DV-related murder rate, per 100,000 residents*
1992	15	35.7	1.3
1993	11	24.4	0.9
1994	10	20.0	0.9
1995	16	23.2	1.4
1996	8	20.0	0.7
1997	8	17.0	0.7
1992-1997	68	24.3	1.0

* Based on annual state population estimates

MISCELLANEOUS

At the time of the offenses, 7.3% of the offenders were reported as suffering from serious psychological problems. Further, 5.7% of offenders attempted or committed suicide at or near the crime scene.

Murders occurring in correctional institutions accounted for 0.7% of the cases.

CONCLUSION

It is intended that this report will provide policymakers and other criminal justice system professionals with some of the information they need to better understand and contend with the offense of murder. It is only through a process of objective assessment and measured response that we can hope to further reduce crime in Hawaii.

See Also:

Green, T.M., Richmond, J.B., & Taira, J.E. (1993). Murder victim and offender characteristics, 1980-1991. *Crime Trend Series*, Volume 1, Issue 2. State of Hawaii: Department of the Attorney General.

Copies of this report can be downloaded from the Crime Prevention & Justice Assistance Division’s Web site:

www.cpja.ag.state.hi.us

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