

LEFT OUT IN THE COLD: HOMICIDE AMONGST PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

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Purpose: Average life expectancy for a person experiencing homelessness (PEH) is 20-30 years less than the general population, largely attributable to higher rates of chronic diseases. Few studies explore other causes. Our goal was to characterize risk factors that exist for PEH who experience a death by violence.

Methods: We examined all adult victims of homicide reported through the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) from 2003-2018. Comparison of factors was performed across victims who were identified as homeless and not-homeless. We utilized the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Point-In-Time (PIT) Data and the United States Census Bureau Population Estimates to estimate homicide rates per 100,000 for the general and homeless populations for adults age 18+.

Results: PEH are over ten times as likely as others to die by homicide. While shelters are often avoided by PEH due to violence, most incidents involving PEH took place outside. PEH are three times more likely to experience death by random homicide.

Conclusions: Interventions into homeless homicide should focus on risk factors specific to PEH including the markedly increased rates of alcohol/ substance abuse problems and mental health issues among homeless victims.

Table 1: Comparison of demographics and circumstances surrounding incidents of homicide victims who identified as homeless versus identified as not homeless

	Not Homeless n=79728 (%)	Homeless n=1484 (%)	p-value
Demographics			
Age in years	32 [24, 45]	43 [32, 52]	<.001
Race/ethnicity minority	52,426 (65.8)	753 (50.7)	<.001
Mental health problem	2250 (2.8)	102 (6.9)	<.001
Alcohol problem	1939 (2.4)	211 (14.2)	<.001
Other substance abuse problem	5527 (6.9)	343 (23.1)	<.001
Circumstances			
Weapon type- Firearm	5824 (73.0)	568 (38.3)	<.001
Weapon type- sharp/ blunt instrument	13954 (17.5)	574 (38.7)	<.001
Random violence	1243 (1.6)	71 (4.8)	<.001
Location - House/apartment	38720 (48.6)	272 (18.3)	<.001
Location - Street/ road/ sidewalk or natural area	19221 (24.1)	624 (42.0)	<.001
Location - Supervised residential facility	236 (0.3)	28 (1.9)	<.001

Figure 1: Homicide Rates among PEH and the General Population

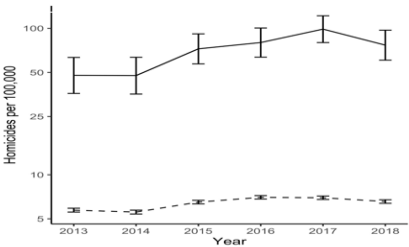


Figure 1 shows homicide rates for the homeless population (solid line) and overall population (dotted line), for the years 2013-2018 (including data from 17 states). Data from NVDRS.

States included (have 2013-2018 data): Alaska, Colorado, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin