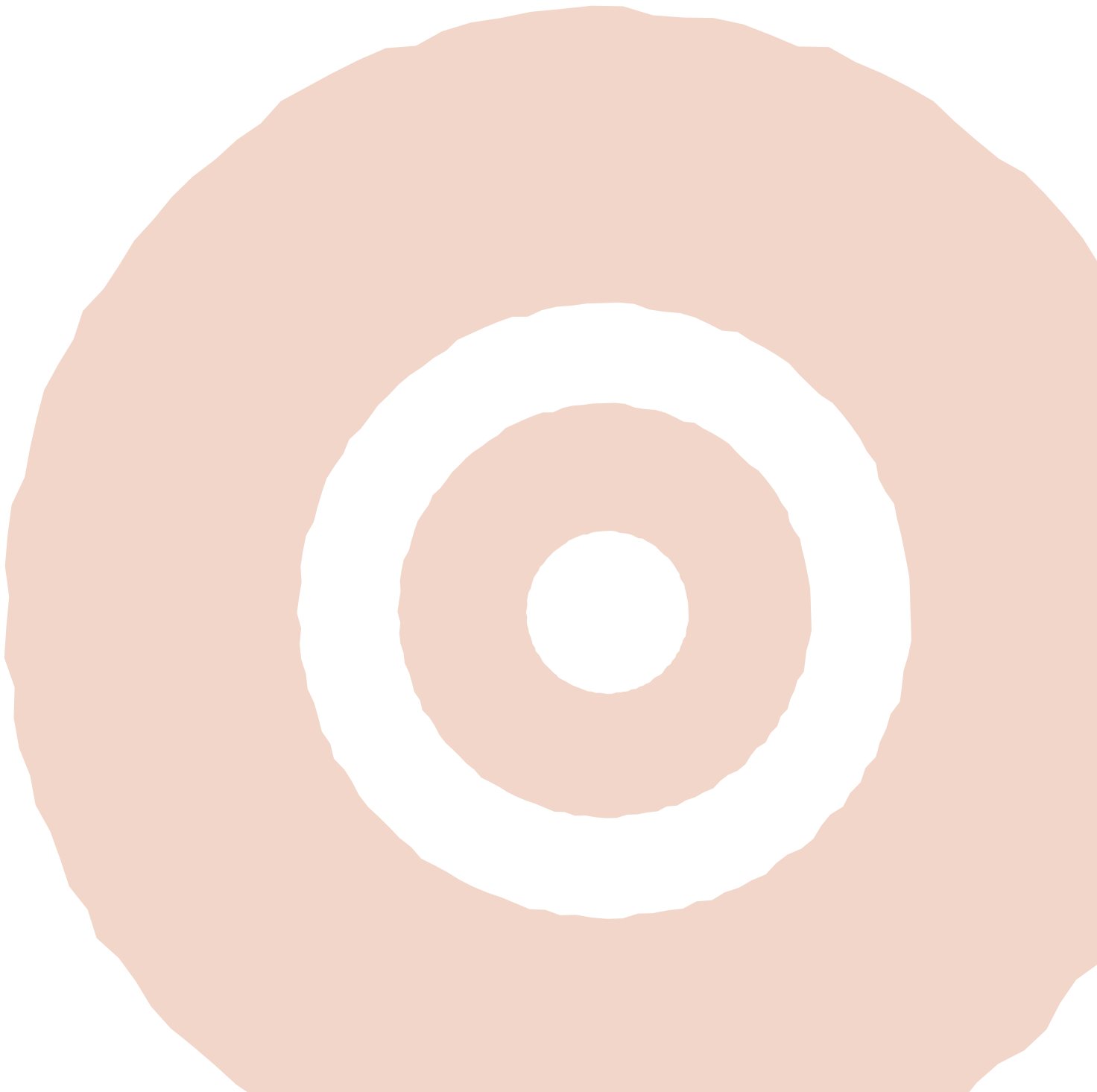


Minnesota Homicides 1985 to 1997

MAY 1999



Minnesota Planning develops long-range plans for the state, stimulates public participation in Minnesota's future and coordinates activities among state agencies, the Minnesota Legislature and other units of government.

The Criminal Justice Center provides criminal and juvenile justice information, conducts research and maintains databases for policy development.

Minnesota Homicides 1985 to 1997 was prepared by LaLonnie Erickson of the Criminal Justice Center at Minnesota Planning, with assistance from staff members Debra Hagel, Ray Lewis and Susan Roth.

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Upon request, *Minnesota Homicides 1985 to 1997* will be made available in an alternate format such as Braille, large print or audio tape. For TTY, contact Minnesota Relay at 800-627-3529 and ask for Minnesota Planning.

May 1999

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An electronic copy of *Minnesota Homicides 1985 to 1997*, the project data file and statewide maps are available on the Minnesota Planning Internet site at www.mnplan.state.mn.us.

Minnesota Homicides 1985 to 1997

Glossary	ii
Summary	1
Examining homicide in Minnesota	1
Trends statewide and across the nation	2
Rate of homicide in Minnesota low compared to other states	2
Activity in Hennepin County influenced the state's homicide trend	3
Situational elements	5
Murders with multiple victims and offenders were uncommon	5
Firearms were the most prevalent type of homicide weapon every year	6
A majority of murders resulted from arguments	8
Human factors: offenders and victims	11
Most homicide offenders were white males age 18 or older	11
Homicide offenders using guns differed from others	12
Murder circumstances varied across demographic categories	12
Victims of homicide were white, male and over 18	13
Firearms were a major factor in most victim groups	13
Victims and offenders were usually of the same demographic group	14
More than half of homicide victims knew their offenders	15
About homicide data	16

Glossary

Below are generally accepted definitions for terms used in this report.

Adult An individual age 18 or older.

Circumstance Describes the event surrounding or leading up to the commission of a homicide.

Colder months October, November, December, January, February and March.

Fall September, October and November.

Firearm A device that is designed to or may be readily converted to expel any type of projectile. Types of firearms are handguns, rifles, shotguns, machine guns, homemade guns, and air, BB or pellet guns.

Homicide The killing of another person. This category includes justifiable homicide, murder, negligent manslaughter and nonnegligent manslaughter.

Immediate family member relationship Describes victims who were parents, children or siblings of the offender.

Intimate relationship Describes victims who were spouses or intimate partners of the offender.

Justifiable homicide Willful killing classified as excusable. The only justifiable homicide is the killing of a criminal by either a peace officer in the line of duty or a private citizen when the criminal is committing certain crimes.

Juvenile An individual under age 18.

Knife or cutting instrument Knife, broken bottle, razor, ice pick, screwdriver or other cutting and stabbing instrument employed as a weapon or means of force.

Midwestern states Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

Murder The willful, premeditated killing of another person.

Negligent manslaughter A death occurring as a result of nonwillful, gross negligence by some person other than the victim. This category does not include traffic fatalities.

Nonnegligent manslaughter The willful but not premeditated killing of another person.

Northeastern states Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont.

Other family member relationship Describes victims who were related to the offender as extended family members such as aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews or grandparents.

Personal weapons Arms, feet, fists, hands, teeth and other body parts employed as weapons or means of force.

Spring March, April and May.

Southern states Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia; the District of Columbia is also included.

Summer June, July and August.

Twin Cities metropolitan area Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington counties.

Victim-offender relationship Describes each victim's relationship to the offenders involved in a single incident of homicide.

Warmer months April, May, June, July, August and September.

Weapon Describes both objects and methods used to commit homicide including unknown firearm types, handguns, rifles, shotguns, other guns, knives or cutting instruments, personal weapons, blunt objects, being pushed or thrown out of a window, explosives, fire, drugs, drowning, strangulation or hanging, asphyxiation and unknown weapon types.

Western states Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming; Puerto Rico also is included.

Winter December, January and February.

Summary

Minnesota Homicides 1985 to 1997 presents findings regarding the demographics of offenders and victims involved in homicide, weapons used, the victim-offender relationship and the circumstance or event leading up to the commission of the offense.

Comprehensive statewide information on homicide in Minnesota has not been gathered before. State policy-makers and the public receive pieces of information about murder incidents through media reports. In addition, only limited annual aggregate counts for a few data categories are available. A 1998 report published by the Criminal Justice Center at Minnesota Planning, *Armed with Data: Creating a Multistate Perspective*, provided limited information on guns used in crime across the four-state region of Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska and Montana. While the project looked at homicide, data for Minnesota alone was not included.

Homicide data submitted by Minnesota law enforcement agencies creates a more complete and reliable picture of the factors involved in each incident. The Criminal Justice Center received a grant from the Justice Research and Statistics Association to examine Supplementary Homicide Report data for the years 1985 to 1997. Data about the occurrence of murder in Minnesota obtained from Supplementary Homicide Report forms filed during that period revealed that:

- Guns were the most prevalent homicide weapon every year since 1985. The use of firearms in murder grew from 36 percent of all weapons in 1985 to 63 percent by 1997. The percent of all firearms used in murder that were handguns ranged between 60 and 80 percent during the 13-year period.
- The proportion of homicide offenders who were 15 to 19 years old nearly quadrupled between 1985 and 1997.
- Minnesota's 1997 homicide rate was lower than most other states at 2.6 per 100,000 people. Only 10 states had a lower rate.
- The number of homicides climbed 117 percent between 1985 and 1995, then fell 32 percent from 1995 to 1997. The 1997 total, however, is still 48 percent above the 1985 statewide total.
- Two law enforcement agencies in the state — the Minneapolis and St. Paul police departments — recorded more than half of all homicides occurring from 1985 to 1997. The overall statewide pattern of homicide was influenced primarily by activity occurring in Minneapolis.
- Most murders over the period were the result of arguments with family or nonfamily members, or over

money or property. Other homicides involved such circumstances as theft- or sex-related offenses or were due to gang activity.

- The percentage of murder victims who were friends or acquaintances of the offender ranged from 33 to 52 percent between 1985 and 1997. Overall, 54 to 70 percent of victims knew their offender as either a friend, acquaintance, spouse or intimate partner, or family member.

- The characteristics of homicide offenders and victims from 1985 to 1997 were similar, with a majority being white males over the age of 18. Offenders who used guns were more likely to be African American males 18 or older. Victims and offenders tended to be of the same demographic group.

Report analyses were limited to descriptions of the data elements collected on Supplementary Homicide Report forms. Conclusions about any conditions that may have contributed to the peak of murders in 1995 and the subsequent two-year decline could not be drawn in *Minnesota Homicides 1985 to 1997*. Future projects could examine the effect on homicide of such phenomena as social events occurring before or at the time of a homicide, statutory changes, the focusing of law enforcement resources, fluctuations in the number of officers, or the influx of gangs or drug dealing into an area. In addition, steps could be taken to implement a better method of collecting data for learning more about each incident of homicide.

Examining homicide in Minnesota

Detailed information about the occurrence of murder in Minnesota has been lacking. Basic annual statistics have suggested an increasing rate of homicide since 1985 followed by the start of a decline in 1995. The use of firearms in homicides was examined in 1997 by the Multistate Firearms Project, in which staff from Statistical Analysis Centers in Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska and South Dakota worked together using four data sets including Supplementary Homicide Reports. The project's final report presented aggregate data for the four states but no distinct data for Minnesota.

Supplementary Homicide Reporting forms are used to collect information on each incidence of homicide for the Uniform Crime Reporting program coordinated and directed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Data recorded for each incident includes the number of victims and offenders

involved, county and season of occurrence, law enforcement agency jurisdiction, victim and offender demographics, the weapon used, the victim-offender relationship and the event, or circumstance, surrounding or leading up to the homicide. The Bureau of Criminal Apprehension at the Department of Public Safety is responsible for maintaining the Supplementary Homicide Report data submitted by law enforcement agencies in Minnesota.

To help compile Minnesota-specific homicide information, the Criminal Justice Center at Minnesota Planning received a grant from the Justice Research and Statistics Association through the National Criminal History Improvement Program. Center staff obtained data from the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension for the years 1985 to 1997. This report on the analysis of the data, *Minnesota Homicides 1985 to 1997*, offers results on state, county and local law enforcement levels, identifies trends across the 13-year time frame and details offender and victim demographics as well as weapon use, incident circumstances and the victim-offender relationship.

A greater understanding of the factors surrounding and contributing to homicide will facilitate informed decision-making and policy development. Data analyses confronted some limits, however. Supplementary Homicide Report forms do not record alcohol or drug use by offenders and victims, so insight into the role of these substances in homicide situations could not be obtained. Forms also lack data on offender and victim mental stability, socioeconomic status and education level. *Minnesota Homicides 1985 to 1997* also was not able to examine the relationship of such influences as social events, law enforcement activities, legislation or shifts in population on the incidence of murder. Revisions to the reporting form, formulation of additional strategies for data collection and further research projects could improve information available for learning about homicide and methods of deterrence.

Trends statewide and across the nation

A total of 1,588 incidents of homicide — murder, nonnegligent manslaughter, justifiable homicide and negligent manslaughter — occurred in Minnesota from 1985 to 1997. Justifiable homicides and negligent manslaughters comprised 1 percent of all incidents.

Justifiable homicide occurs when an on-duty police officer or a private citizen kills a criminal in certain situations such as

protecting themselves against physical attack or when the criminal is committing certain crimes or fleeing the crime scene. Across the 13 years, two justifiable homicide cases involving private citizens as the offender were recorded.

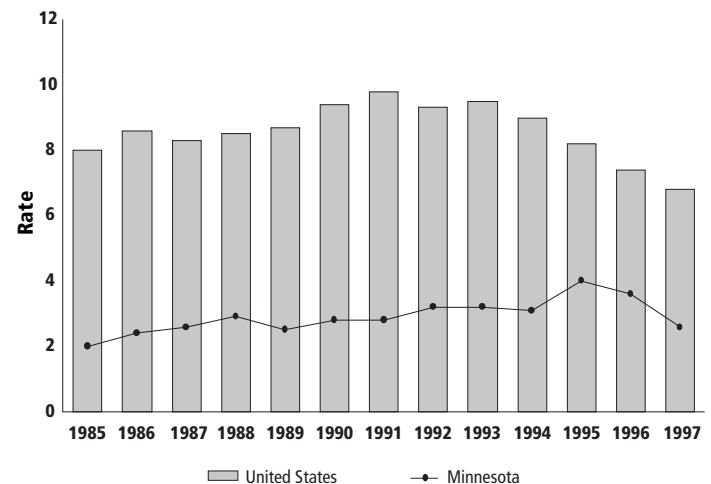
Deaths resulting from nonwillful, gross negligence by some person other than the victim are considered negligent manslaughters. Included in these are hunting accidents, gun-cleaning accidents or incidents involving children playing with a gun. Five incidents were due to children playing with guns. Subsequent analyses in this report do not include cases of justifiable homicide or negligent manslaughter.

One incident of homicide may involve multiple victims and multiple offenders. Over the 13-year period there were a total of 1,672 victims of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter and 1,860 offenders. Seventeen percent of offenders were unknown, meaning that law enforcement officials could not determine whether these incidents involved more than one offender.

Rate of homicide in Minnesota low compared to other states

Both Minnesota and the United States saw the rate of homicide increase after 1985. Nationwide, homicides

Minnesota homicide rate per 100,000 people peaked four years after nation's



- From 1985 to 1995, Minnesota's homicide rate doubled from 2 to 4 homicides per 100,000 people. Two years later, the number of homicides dropped 32 percent, from 182 in 1985 to 124 in 1997.

Note: Rates were calculated using yearly July 1 population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Federal Bureau of Investigation and Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

peaked in 1991 at 9.8 per 100,000 people and then declined to below 1985 levels, to 6.8, in 1997. Minnesota did not experience a peak in the number of homicides until 1995, topping out at a rate of four homicides per 100,000 people and falling to 2.6 by 1997 — a figure slightly above the 1985 rate.

Minnesota’s 1997 homicide rate was below that of most other states. Thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia reported a higher rate of homicide than Minnesota in that year. New Hampshire and South Dakota recorded the lowest rate at 1.4 each, and the District of Columbia was highest at 56.9. The average state homicide rate among these states was 6.9 per 100,000 people.

Proportionally, less than 1 percent of the 18,210 homicides committed in the United States occurred in Minnesota. California had 2,579 homicide deaths in 1997, giving it the largest single-state share of the national total. Midwestern states reported a little more than one-fifth of all homicides,

while those in the Northeast together accounted for 14 percent. Southern states had the greatest share at 43 percent. Within the Midwest, Illinois had the highest number — 1,096 — of homicides, while North Dakota ranked last with six. Minnesota reported the fifth lowest number of homicides among Midwestern states.

After a 117 percent growth between 1985 and 1995, the number of homicides in Minnesota took a downward turn. Between 1995 and 1997, the number fell by 32 percent, although it was still 48 percent above 1985 totals. Nationally, the two-year decrease was 16 percent, and 1997 homicides were 4 percent below those reported in 1985.

Activity in Hennepin County influenced the state’s homicide trend

Patterns of homicide within the state were primarily influenced by activity occurring in one county: Hennepin. The trend line of homicides committed within Minnesota over the 13-year period mirrored that of Hennepin County, peaking in 1995 and sharply declining thereafter. While Ramsey County reported the second largest share of homicides in the state, it did not experience the same dramatic increase in 1995. Homicides in Ramsey County reached a high point in 1992 before beginning to fall.

Hennepin and Ramsey counties together accounted for more than half of all homicides in the state every year from 1985 to 1997. Hennepin County alone had from 39 up to 59

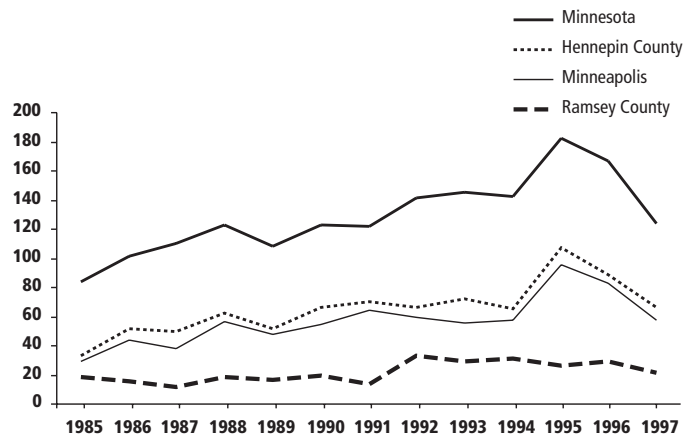
Only 10 states had lower homicide rates than Minnesota in 1997

Rates per 100,000 people, lowest to highest

State	Rate	State	Rate
New Hampshire	1.4	New York	6.0
South Dakota	1.4	Kansas	6.0
Vermont	1.5	Texas	6.8
Iowa	1.8	Florida	6.9
Massachusetts	1.9	Oklahoma	6.9
Maine	2.0	Virginia	7.2
North Dakota	2.2	Indiana	7.3
Utah	2.4	Georgia	7.5
Rhode Island	2.5	New Mexico	7.7
Delaware	2.5	Michigan	7.8
Minnesota	2.6	Missouri	7.9
Oregon	2.9	California	8.0
Nebraska	3.0	Arizona	8.2
Idaho	3.2	North Carolina	8.3
Wyoming	3.5	South Carolina	8.4
Connecticut	3.8	Alaska	8.9
Wisconsin	4.0	Illinois	9.2
Colorado	4.0	Tennessee	9.5
Hawaii	4.0	Maryland	9.9
West Virginia	4.1	Alabama	9.9
New Jersey	4.2	Arkansas	9.9
Washington	4.3	Nevada	11.2
Ohio	4.7	Mississippi	13.1
Montana	4.8	Louisiana	15.7
Kentucky	5.8	District of Columbia	56.9
Pennsylvania	5.9		

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 1997*

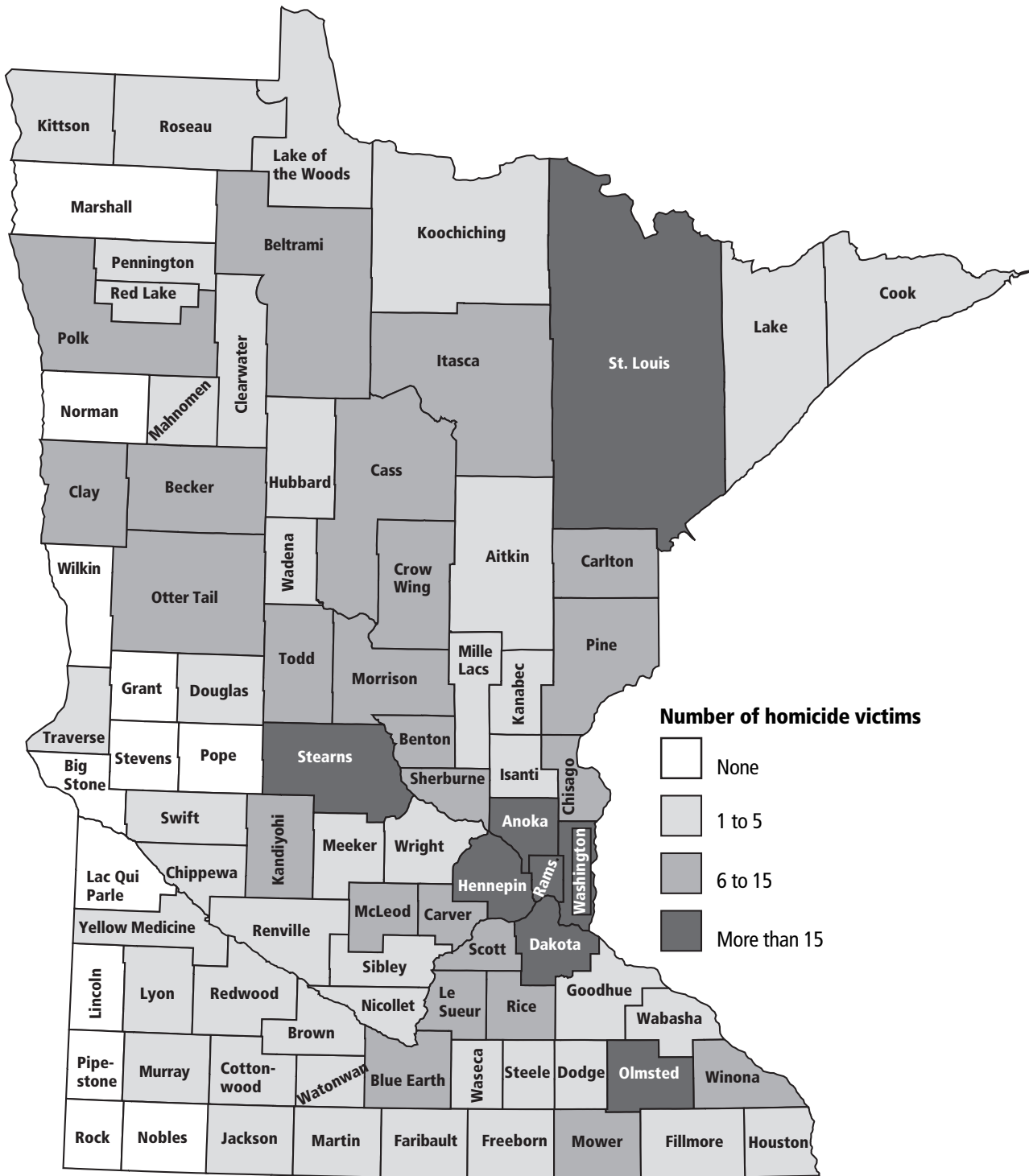
Homicides in Minneapolis shaped the state pattern from 1985 to 1997



■ Ramsey County, which accounted for the second largest proportion of all homicides statewide, did not experience the same sharp increase in the number of homicides in 1995 as did Hennepin County. Its peak occurred in 1992.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

Forty-three counties had one to five homicides between 1985 and 1997



■ Fifty-one percent of all homicides occurring in the state from 1985 to 1997 were in Hennepin County.

Note: Data pictured represents victim totals for the combined years of 1985 to 1997.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

percent of homicides statewide, while Ramsey County had between 11 and 23 percent. St. Louis, Anoka and Dakota counties had the next largest shares of homicides, with 3, 3 and 2 percent, respectively, for all years of data combined. Twelve counties had no reports of homicide during the 13-year period, 15 documented only one case, and four — Anoka, Hennepin, Ramsey and St. Louis — reported homicides in each year. The Twin Cities area counties of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington had from 64 to 85 percent of all homicide cases from 1985 to 1997.

A deeper look into homicide activity shows that two law enforcement agencies recorded more than half of all homicides committed between 1985 and 1997. The Minneapolis Police Department reported from 35 to 53 percent of Minnesota homicides, followed by the St. Paul Police Department with 11 to 23 percent. From 1985 to 1997, both departments accounted for 75 percent or more of all homicide activity occurring in their respective counties. Only eight other police departments — Blaine, Bloomington, Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Duluth, Rochester and St. Cloud — each reported 10 or more total homicides in the 13-year period; their combined total was 124 cases. Both the surge in homicides and recent decline statewide since 1995 can likely be attributed to activity reported by the Minneapolis Police Department.

Situational elements

Excluding justifiable homicide and negligent manslaughter, which are not willful or premeditated, a total of 1,572 incidents of murder occurred in Minnesota from 1985 to 1997. As has been noted, more than one victim or offender may be involved in a single incident of homicide.

Situational factors provide additional insight into the phenomena surrounding a homicide incident, including the number of offenders and victims involved, the month and season of occurrence, weapon use and the circumstances or events leading up to the murder.

Murders with multiple victims and offenders were uncommon

Most cases of homicide involved one victim and one offender. Homicide situations with multiple offenders were, however, more likely than those with multiple victims. Ninety-one to 98 percent of incidents occurring between

1985 and 1997 had one victim, and 60 to 76 percent involved single offenders. In 13 to 28 percent of homicide incidents, offender information was unknown: law enforcement officers were unable to identify any suspects. The largest number of victims recorded in any one incident of homicide was five in both 1988 and 1994. The most offenders documented in any one incident were 10 in 1997.

Compared to other counties, the seven Twin Cities metropolitan area counties more commonly had cases with more than one victim every year except three — 1985, 1994 and 1996. Most incidents with more than one offender occurred primarily in Hennepin and Ramsey counties; slightly less than half of all such cases, however, occurred in these counties in 1996. Each year, more than 70 percent of cases with unknown offenders were recorded in Hennepin and Ramsey counties as well. Overall, Hennepin County accounted for one-third to about one-half of all multiple-victim and multiple-offender homicides from 1985 to 1997, while Ramsey County had between 15 and 25 percent.

Monthly and seasonal occurrences of homicide varied from 1985 to 1997. No one month surfaced over the 13 years under study as being a common factor in homicide incidents. In most cases, the largest percentage of homicides in each year tended to occur in one of the months from July to December. For all years of data combined, a majority of incidents — 10 percent — happened in July. In 1995, when homicides in Minnesota reached a peak, August had the most incidents, followed by March and May.

Summer and fall — the months of June through November — were the most typical seasons for homicide incidents. One of these seasons recorded the largest percentage of cases in nine of the 13 years since 1985. Overall, 28 percent of homicides occurred in the summer months of June, July and August. Slightly more than half of all homicides were committed in the warmer months of April, May, June, July, August and September. In contrast, both 1985 and 1992 recorded 60 percent of homicides occurring in the colder months of October, November, December, January, February and March. Almost three-fourths of the cases in 1996 were recorded in warmer months.

Hennepin and Ramsey counties registered some seasonal differences in the occurrence of murder. August had the largest percentage of homicide incidents in Hennepin County from 1985 to 1997, while October was the prevailing month in Ramsey County, with each month totaling 11 percent. In addition, Hennepin County had a higher number of murders in warmer months compared to Ramsey County, where 51 percent of homicides occurred in colder months.

Situation types also varied with respect to season. Most murder incidents with single offenders and single victims occurred in summer months, primarily July. The greatest number of homicides with unidentifiable offenders was in July as well. Situations with more than one offender tended to happen in October and those with multiple victims in November. An equal amount of multiple-victim situations occurred in the summer and fall, while most multiple-offender incidents were in the fall.

Firearms were the most prevalent type of homicide weapon every year

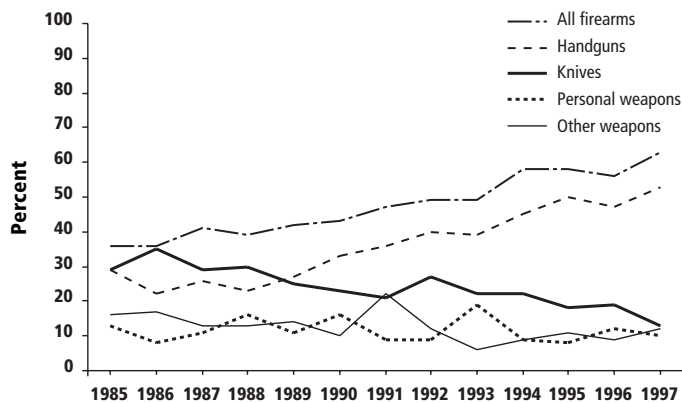
A number of different types of weapons — which for purposes of this report include various methods as well — were employed by offenders to commit homicide in Minnesota. Weapons included such things as firearms; knives; blunt objects; explosives; fists, feet and other body parts; fire; drugs; drowning; pushing the victim out of a window; strangulation; and asphyxiation. Four percent of weapons could not be identified in homicides between 1985 and 1997.

Since 1985, the use of firearms — most notably, handguns — in murder has been steadily increasing. In 1985, knives

and handguns were the most common weapons used in homicide, with each accounting for 29 percent of the total murders; between 1986 and 1988, knives surpassed handguns as the weapon of choice. Beginning in 1989, however, handguns rose above knives to comprise 27 percent of all murder weapons and increased to 53 percent by 1997, becoming the number one weapon each year in that period. The proportions of knives and other weapons such as blunt objects, fists, explosives, fire and drugs used in homicide decreased over the 13-year period. All firearms combined, including handguns, rifles, shotguns, other guns and unknown firearm types, have comprised the largest percentage of homicide weapons every year, totaling 36 percent in 1985 and growing to 63 percent in 1997.

Homicide activity in Minnesota from 1985 to 1997 closely reflected the pattern of handgun use. The increase in homicides since 1985, the peak in 1995 and the decline thereafter mirror the trends seen in handgun use in murder. Over the study period, 60 to 87 percent of all guns involved in murder were handguns. In 1995, almost nine out of 10 firearm-related murders were committed with a handgun — a higher proportion than in any other year. Overall, shotguns followed handguns as the second most common firearm used in homicide.

Firearms were the most common murder weapon from 1985 to 1997



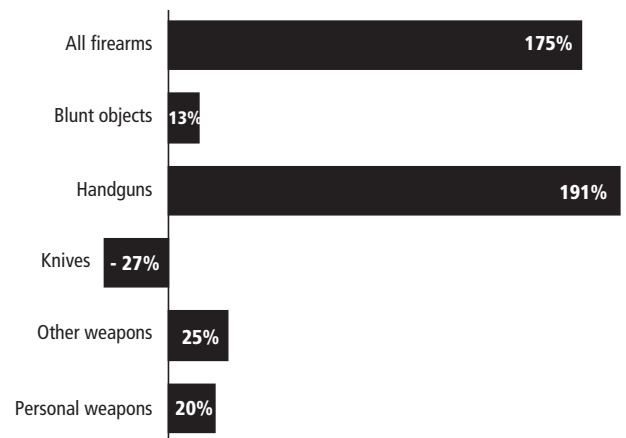
■ While the use of knives, personal weapons and other weapons in homicide has declined or remained stable since 1985, the use of firearms, primarily handguns, has risen steadily. Guns comprised more than half of all murder weapons in 1997.

Note: "All firearms" include handguns, rifles, shotguns, other guns and unknown firearm types. "Personal weapons" include arms, feet, fists, hands, teeth and other body parts employed as weapons or means of force. "Other weapons" include blunt objects, explosives, fire, narcotics or drugs, drowning, pushing or throwing out of a window, strangulation or hanging, and asphyxiation. This graph does not show data for unknown weapons.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

Use of handguns in murder nearly tripled

Percent change from 1985 to 1997

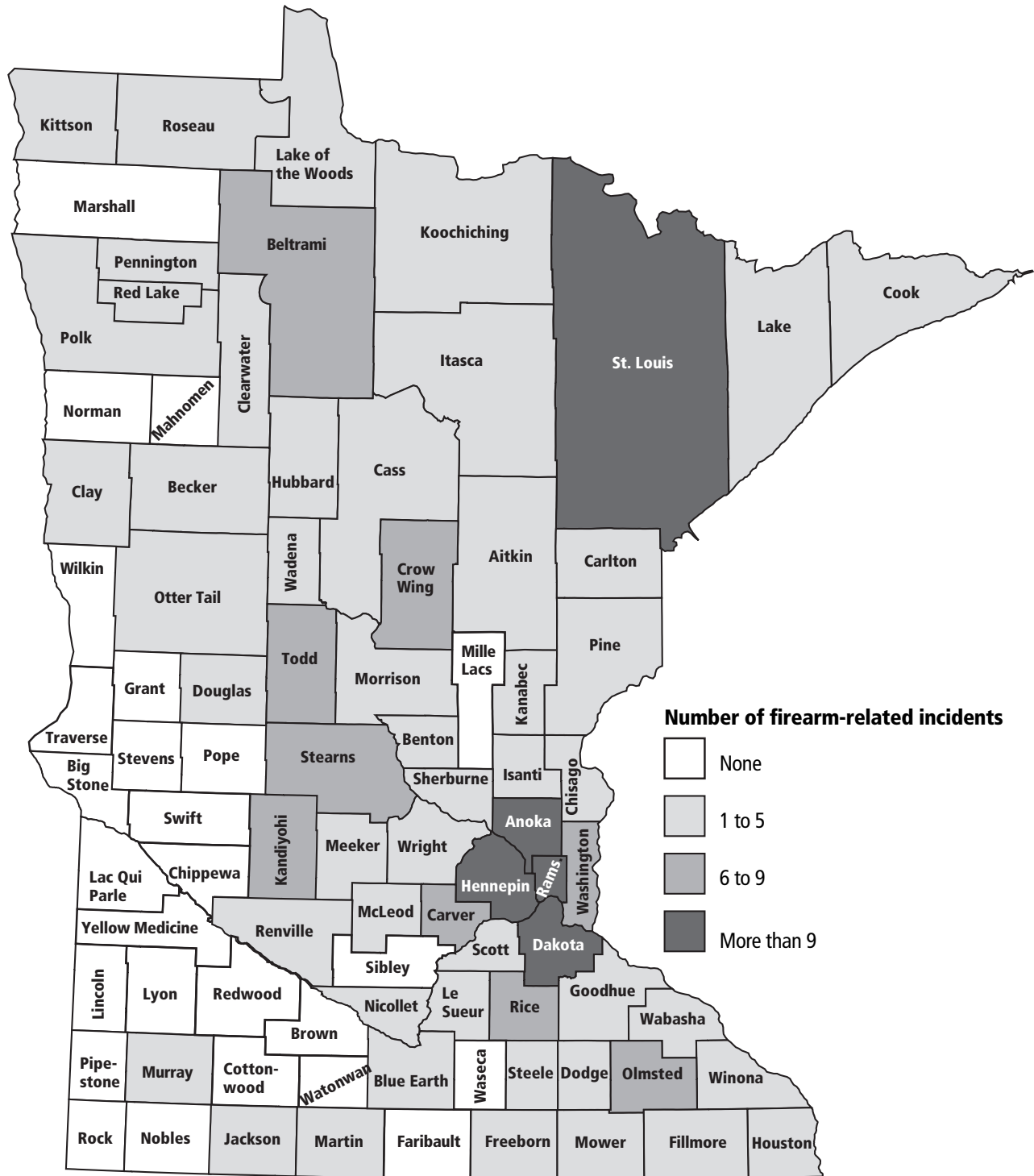


■ The use of weapons other than firearms in homicides grew by no more than 25 percent or declined.

Note: "All firearms" include handguns, rifles, shotguns, other guns and unknown firearm types. "Personal weapons" include arms, feet, fists, hands, teeth and other body parts employed as weapons or means of force. "Other weapons" include explosives, fire, narcotics or drugs, drowning, pushing or throwing out of a window, strangulation or hanging, and asphyxiation. This graph does not show data for unknown weapons.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

Hennepin and Ramsey counties reported 70 percent of all firearm-related homicide incidents from 1985 to 1997



■ Between 1985 and 1997, 16 counties had only one incidence of gun-related murder.

Note: Data pictured represents totals for the combined years of 1985 to 1997 and refers to the number of incidents rather than the number of victims.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

Guns played a role in homicide in almost every county in the state. Regardless of weapon used, 75 counties in Minnesota reported at least one incident of homicide between 1985 to 1997. Sixty-one of those counties over the 13-year period had incidents involving a firearm as the murder weapon: only 14 counties recorded cases not involving guns.

Weapon types did not vary greatly within or outside of Hennepin and Ramsey counties. Firearms comprised the largest percentage of homicide weapons, followed by knives and personal weapons. Weapon trends over time in these counties followed the same course as those statewide. Regional comparisons, however, show that while most weapons of all types were more prevalent in these two counties, rifles and shotguns were not. More than half of all murders resulting from the use of rifles and shotguns took place in counties other than Hennepin and Ramsey. In addition, handguns were about twice as likely to be used in Hennepin or Ramsey homicide incidents as they were in the other 85 counties combined.

On a local level, while most police departments recorded firearms as the most common homicide weapon, firearm and handgun murders were concentrated in the jurisdictions of the Minneapolis and St. Paul police departments. Almost two-thirds of all firearm-related incidents and seven out of 10 handgun-related homicides occurring from 1985 to 1997 were encountered by these law enforcement agencies. The Minneapolis Police Department alone reported a majority of all firearm and handgun homicides statewide at 49 and

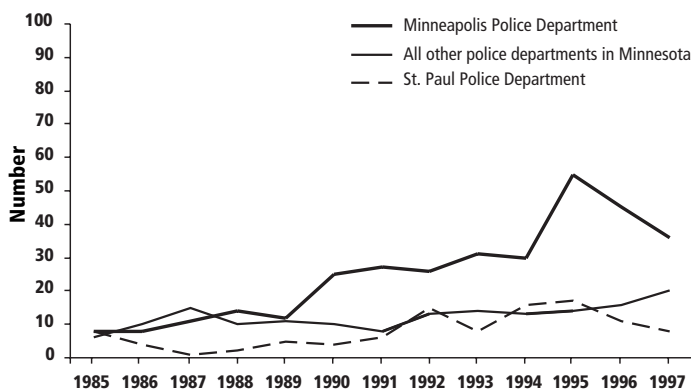
55 percent, respectively. More than half of all homicides committed with rifles or shotguns and unidentified weapons were documented by police departments other than those in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Handguns comprised a majority of all firearm-related murders reported by Minneapolis, St. Paul and all other police departments combined from 1985 to 1997 — 88, 86 and 59 percent, respectively. Proportions of handgun use in all homicides, however, fluctuated during the 13-year period but gradually increased over time for most law enforcement agencies, except St. Paul. In 1985, 28 percent of all murders in Minneapolis involved a handgun; this figure more than doubled to 62 percent by 1997. Data for all other police departments combined shows that handgun murders also went up more than two times, from 18 to 46 percent, in the same time frame. On the other hand, homicides involving handguns in St. Paul decreased from 53 percent in 1985 to 40 percent in 1997.

Weapon use in situations with single or multiple victims and offenders differed. Comparing single-victim situations with those involving two or more, weapon proportions were similar except for personal weapons: 12 percent of single-victim situations involved personal weapons as opposed to 4 percent of multiple-victim situations. Other variations were noted with respect to offenders. Handguns were more prevalent in situations with multiple offenders, while knives were in those with single offenders. Half of all offenders in group situations and 34 percent of lone offenders used handguns. More than one-quarter of single-offender incidents involved knives, compared to 15 percent of incidents involving two or more offenders. Ratios were comparable among single-offender and multiple-offender situations for all other weapon types.

Examination of weapon use by season showed no differences. Similar proportions of each weapon type were used in each of the seasons — winter, spring, summer and fall — and in colder and warmer months.

Handgun-related murders in Minneapolis rose sharply from 1985 to 1997, peaking in 1995



■ The St. Paul Police Department and other departments across the state reported a relatively stable number of handgun-related homicides between 1985 and 1997.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

A majority of murders resulted from arguments

Law enforcement officers describe the circumstances surrounding or leading up to a homicide using one of 44 circumstance categories including “unknown” on the Supplementary Homicide Report form. Coding of the circumstance may be inconsistent since many descriptions overlap. For example, one incident of homicide may have been argument-related, included violations of narcotic drug laws and involved gang members; each of these descriptions is available as a category, but only one can be recorded on the form. In addition, lack of complete

information about the incident will narrow the circumstance classification. The FBI does not provide any definitions for the circumstance codes; therefore, misinterpretation of categories may further weaken the information. Data fluctuations from year to year may be more a reflection of differences in law enforcement documentation techniques than actual changes in activity.

Analysis of Minnesota’s homicide circumstance data showed yearly variations in almost every category. As noted above, it is difficult to determine whether these oscillations pinpoint differences in the events surrounding homicide or represent inconsistent documentation practices.

For most of the study years, arguments comprised the largest percentage of murder circumstances, followed by noncrime-related activities. From 1985 to 1997, 36 percent

of all murders were argument-related and 29 percent were noncrime-related. Noncrime circumstances describe situations where the offender was not involved in the commission of another crime such as rape, robbery or arson that led to the murder. These noncrime homicides may have involved, among other things, lovers’ triangles or gang activity, or may have occurred at the scene of a car accident, a barbeque or shopping mall. Twelve percent of all homicide circumstances were unknown, and 12 percent were theft-related. According to available data, only 3 percent of all homicides committed over the 13-year period were attributed directly to alcohol- or drug-induced brawls. Substance use may have been a factor in other homicides as well. Ascertaining alcohol or drug use by offenders and victims is difficult since this information is not documented on reporting forms and is not linked to any other circumstance code.

Almost three-fourths of all murders resulting from arguments involved nonfamily members, 23 percent involved family members and 5 percent involved disputes over money or property. Three-fourths of theft-related murders — which include the offenses of burglary, larceny,

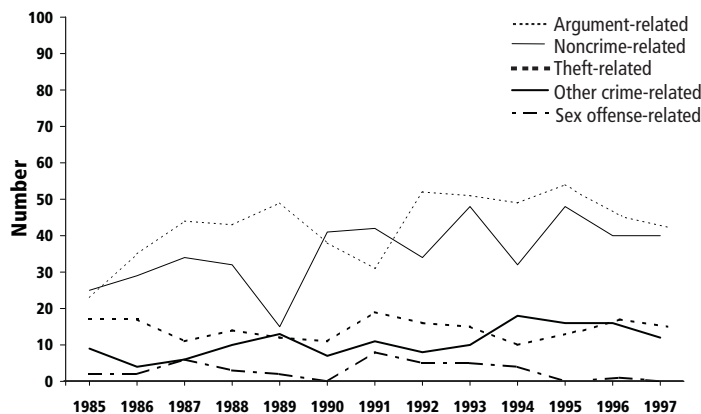
Argument with a nonfamily member was most common homicide circumstance from 1985 to 1997

Argument with a nonfamily member	26%
Other noncrime (type unknown)	20
Circumstance unknown	12
Robbery	9
Argument with a family member	8
Violation of narcotic drug laws	5
Alcohol- or drug-induced brawl	3
Burglary	3
Gangland killing	3
Argument over money or property	2
Lovers’ triangle	2
Other crime (type unknown)	2
Rape	2
Arson	1
Child killed by the baby sitter	1
Suspected relationship to a crime	1
Juvenile gangland killing	0.5
Larceny	0.3
Motor vehicle theft	0.3
Other sex offenses	0.3
Prostitution and commercialized vice	0.3
Sniper attack	0.2
Institutional killing	0.1

Note: “Other crime” circumstances are situations in which the offender committed the homicide while engaging in another crime such as kidnapping or vandalism. “Other noncrime” circumstances describe murders that occurred during such situations as a car accident or a barbeque, or at a shopping mall. Analyses were completed on data for the combined years of 1985 to 1997.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

Argument-related homicides almost doubled between 1985 and 1997



■ Noncrime-related circumstances comprised the second largest proportion of all murders each year.

Note: This table reflects incident totals. “Sex offenses” include other sex offenses, prostitution and commercialized vice and rape. “Noncrime” circumstances include such situations as lovers’ triangles, children killed by the baby sitter, gangland killings, institutional killings, sniper attacks and unspecified noncrime circumstances. “Theft offenses” include burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft and robbery. “Argument” circumstances include arguments with family and nonfamily members as well as those over money or property. “Other crime” circumstances include such situations as arson, violations of narcotic drug laws and unspecified crime-related circumstances. This graph does not show data for unknown circumstances.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

motor vehicle theft and robbery — occurred during robberies.

Regionally, a majority of all homicide circumstances were documented in Hennepin and Ramsey counties. More murders resulting from arguments with family members, unspecified crime-related activities, motor vehicle thefts and sniper attacks occurred in counties outside of Hennepin and Ramsey; the 85 other counties also had more children killed by the baby sitter and institutional killings than did Hennepin and Ramsey.

Within law enforcement jurisdictions, the Minneapolis and St. Paul police departments reported well over half of most homicide circumstance types. Agencies other than those in Minneapolis and St. Paul reported the largest share of murders connected to arguments with family

members, arson, burglaries, motor vehicle thefts, unspecified crime activities and unspecified noncrime activities, as well as children killed by the baby sitter and institutional killings.

Nine out of 10 homicide circumstances involved only one victim, except for arson. Forty percent of arson-related murders from 1985 to 1997 had two or more victims. A majority of both single- and multiple-victim murders were caused by arguments with nonfamily members or unspecified noncrime activities — 46 and 44 percent, respectively. All homicides due to sex offenses, larcenies, motor vehicle thefts, alcohol- or drug-induced brawls and sniper attacks had single victims; all incidents of children being killed by the baby sitter, juvenile gang killings and institutional killings involved single victims, as well.

Hennepin and Ramsey counties usually accounted for a majority of homicide circumstances from 1985 to 1997

	Hennepin and Ramsey counties	Other 85 counties
Argument with a nonfamily member	290	112
Other noncrime (type unknown)	176	143
Circumstance unknown	158	29
Robbery	110	29
Argument with a family member	51	77
Violation of narcotic drug laws	80	5
Alcohol- or drug-induced brawl	35	13
Burglary	27	12
Gangland killing	36	3
Argument over money or property	21	9
Lovers' triangle	22	7
Other crime (type unknown)	11	13
Rape	22	8
Arson	9	8
Child killed by the baby sitter	5	7
Suspected relationship to a crime	11	3
Juvenile gangland killing	8	0
Larceny	4	1
Motor vehicle theft	1	3
Other sex offenses	2	2
Prostitution and commercialized vice	4	0
Sniper attack	1	2
Institutional killing	0	2

Note: This table reflects incident totals for the combined years of 1985 to 1997. "Other crime" circumstances are situations in which the offender committed the homicide while engaging in another crime such as kidnapping or vandalism. "Other noncrime" circumstances describe murders that occurred during such situations as a car accident or a barbeque, or at a shopping mall.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

Gun use was inconsistent across murder circumstances from 1985 to 1997

Sniper attack	100%
Gangland killing	97
Juvenile gangland killing	88
Violation of narcotic drug laws	87
Argument over money or property	77
Motor vehicle theft	75
Lovers' triangle	72
Circumstance unknown	50
Argument with a nonfamily member	48
Other noncrime (type unknown)	48
Argument with a family member	46
Other crime (type unknown)	42
Robbery	40
Larceny	40
Burglary	30
Alcohol- or drug-induced brawl	27
Other sex offenses	25
Prostitution and commercialized vice	25
Rape	13
Suspected relationship to a crime	7
Arson	0
Child killed by the baby sitter	0
Institutional killing	0

Note: "Other crime" circumstances are situations in which the offender committed the homicide while engaging in another crime such as kidnapping or vandalism. "Other noncrime" circumstances describe murders that occurred during such situations as a car accident or a barbeque, or at a shopping mall. Analyses were completed on data for the combined years of 1985 to 1997.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

Most circumstance types also involved single offenders. Thirty-three percent of single-offender situations were arguments with nonfamily members; unspecified noncrime activities accounted for almost one-quarter. Multiple offenders were likely to be present in homicides related to arguments with nonfamily members — 22 percent — and robberies, at 28 percent.

While the occurrence of homicide within various circumstances did not follow a seasonal pattern, some general differences were noted. Most circumstance types were more prevalent in the warmer months of April, May, June, July, August and September; those types with a larger percentage of incidents in colder months included arson, children killed by the baby sitter, juvenile gang killings, lovers' triangles, motor vehicle thefts, robberies and unspecified crime activities.

Analysis of weapon use within different circumstance categories showed that firearms were most common. These weapon types did not, however, comprise the largest percentage within homicides involving alcohol- or drug-induced brawls, arson, institutional killings, other sex offenses, prostitution and commercialized vice, rape or for children killed by the baby sitter. More than 80 percent of situations where children were killed by the baby sitter involved personal weapons such as hands, fists or feet. Forty-two percent of murders due to alcohol- or drug-induced brawls involved knives, as did 33 percent of homicides occurring in rape situations.

Human factors: offenders and victims

A total of 1,860 offenders and 1,672 victims were involved in the 1,572 incidents of murder that occurred in Minnesota from 1985 to 1997. Supplementary Homicide Report forms document information about each offender and victim involved in an incident of murder, including the offender's and victim's race, ethnicity, sex and age. The victim's relationship to each offender is noted as well. While some information was missing in the race, sex and age categories in the reports from the 13-year period, a large portion of offender and victim ethnicity data was lacking; thus, this study does not examine offender ethnicity. It should also be noted that categorization of race and ethnicity is usually determined by observation.

Most homicide offenders were white males age 18 or older

Overall, homicide offenders tended to be white. Twenty-eight to 58 percent of homicide offenders between 1985 and 1997 were white, while 21 to 40 percent were African American. In five years of the study period — 1985, 1992, 1994, 1995 and 1996 — African American offenders comprised the largest proportion of offenders. Asians equaled the smallest percentage of offenders, totaling from zero to 8 percent across the 13 years. The number of both African American and white offenders rose from 1985 to 1997, while those of American Indian and Asian offenders remained relatively constant. From 12 to 27 percent of offender racial data was missing each year.

Males made up the majority of offenders. Sixty-eight to 81 percent of homicide offenders each year between 1985 and 1997 were male. The number of female offenders increased slightly, going from 7 percent of all offenders in 1985 to 9 percent in 1997; the number of males in those years was 75 and 79 percent, respectively. Eleven to 25 percent of information on the offender's sex was missing for each year under study.

The largest proportion of homicide offenders were adults, but juvenile involvement grew. Sixty-two to 79 percent of offenders between 1985 and 1997 were over age 18. Juveniles comprised 5 to 18 percent of offenders. The number of juveniles involved in homicide peaked in 1995, declined in 1996 and went up again in 1997. Youth under 18 equaled 5 percent of all homicide offenders in 1985 and 14 percent in 1997. The largest proportion of juvenile offenders occurred in 1988. Age data was missing for 13 to 28 percent of all offenders in each year.

From 1985 to 1997, the most prevalent ages for offenders were 20 and 18, at 6 and 5 percent, respectively. Less than 2 percent of all incidents combined involved youth younger than 15; the percentage was the same for adults age 65 and older. Youth age 15 to 19 and young adults between 20 and 24 comprised the largest totals of homicide offenders over the 13-year period. The former comprised between 7 and 30 percent of offenders between 1985 and 1997 and the latter, 14 to 26 percent.

Proportions for most age groups have declined or remained relatively constant since 1985, except for ages 15 to 19 and 25 to 29. The proportion of 15- to 19-year-old homicide offenders nearly quadrupled over the study period, rising from 7 percent of all offenders in 1985 to 27 percent in 1997. The share of offenders ages 25 to 29 increased

slightly, going from 12 percent to 14 percent during the same period.

While most offenders committed the homicide alone, those who murdered as part of a group varied in characteristics. Fifty-seven percent of all Asian offenders from 1985 to 1997 were with a group at the time of the homicide. More than two-thirds of males were lone offenders, compared to 75 percent of women. Juveniles were equally likely to murder alone or with others, while almost three-fourths of adults committed the homicide alone. The older the offender, the greater the chance he or she committed the offense alone.

Homicide offenders using guns differed from others

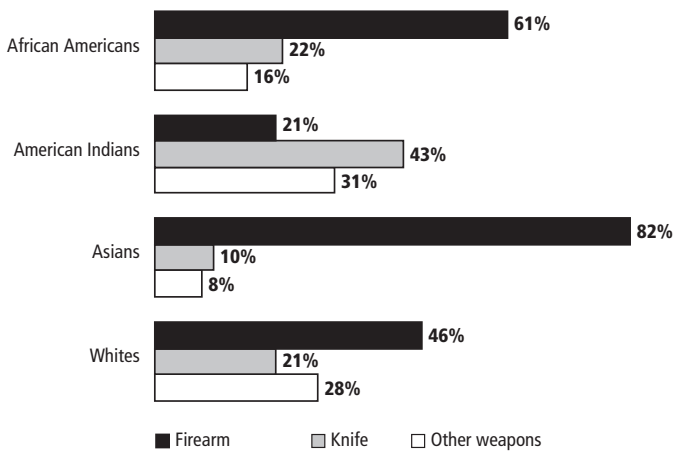
The characteristics of homicide offenders who used guns to commit the offense differed somewhat from those of homicide offenders in general. A majority of offenders using guns were African American males over age 18. Between 18 and 54 percent of all homicide offenders using firearms during the study period were African American. Whites comprised the largest percentage of offenders using guns in five of the study years: 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989 and

1997. Overall, American Indians, at 3 percent, made up the smallest percentage of offenders using firearms. Two-thirds or more of offenders murdering with guns each year were male, compared to less than 10 percent who were female. In addition, 54 to 85 percent of offenders using firearms were adults, while 22 percent or fewer were juveniles.

Youth ages 15 to 19 and young adults ages 20 to 24 made up the majority of offenders using firearms among the age groups. Fifteen- to 19-year-olds also showed the greatest increase in gun-related murder involvement, climbing from 9 percent of all such offenders in 1985 to 34 percent in 1997. Proportions for those ages 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 rose slightly as well, while those of other age groups declined.

Differences were noted with respect to weapon use within various offender groups across the study years. Seventy-one percent of Asian and 53 percent of African American offenders from 1985 to 1997 were armed with handguns. Less than 30 percent of whites and only 17 percent of American Indians used a handgun. Firearms combined were the most common weapon type for all racial groups, except American Indians. More than four out of 10 American Indian offenders used a knife. Over half of male offenders used a gun, compared to 22 percent who employed a knife. The most common weapon for female offenders was a knife, at 33 percent. Guns and other weapons were used equally by female offenders, at 30 percent each. Almost half of juvenile offenders used a handgun, compared to 37 percent of adults. With respect to firearms overall, 63 percent of juvenile homicide offenders employed these weapon types, as did almost half of adults. Knives followed firearms in frequency of use for both juveniles and adults, at 22 and 24 percent, respectively. The age group with the largest percentage of handgun use was the 15- to 19-year-olds at 53 percent, followed by young adults ages 20 to 24 at 44 percent. Sixty-four percent of offenders between ages 15 and 19 used some type of firearm in the homicide, a higher proportion than any other age group.

American Indian offenders were least likely to use guns in homicide from 1985 to 1997



■ Eight out of 10 Asian homicide offenders used a gun.

Note: "Other weapons" includes personal weapons, blunt objects, poison, pushing or throwing out of a window, explosives, fire, drugs, drowning, strangulation and asphyxiation. This graph does not show data for unknown weapon types; therefore, percentages will not add to 100. Calculations are based on data for the combined years 1985 to 1997.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

Murder circumstances varied across demographic categories

In most cases, whites comprised the majority of offenders in each circumstance category, except robbery, narcotic drug law violations, arguments over money or property and gangland killings: most of these incidents involved African American offenders. Proportions within racial groups were consistent across most circumstances as well, with most offenders being involved in homicides due to arguments with nonfamily members or unspecified noncrime activities, although offender groups did differ in some

instances. Compared to other races, a larger proportion of African American and Asian offenders were involved in robbery-related murders. American Indians committed more murders due to alcohol- or drug-induced brawls, while whites committed more murders in arguments with family. Proportionally within race groups, more Asians were involved in gang-related murders.

While adults comprised a majority in all circumstance categories, proportions within age groups were consistent across all categories; an exception was the greater proportion of juvenile homicide offenders involved in robberies and gangland killings. A higher proportion of adult offenders were involved in arguments with nonfamily members, and a greater share of female murderers were involved in unspecified noncrime activities.

Victims of homicide were white, male and over 18

Between 1985 and 1997, a majority of murder victims — 48 to 74 percent — were white. In 1995, however, African Americans rose above whites to make up the largest share of victims, at 47 percent. The smallest percentage of victims each year, totaling between zero and 4 percent, were Asians. African Americans showed the greatest increase in homicide victimization — 105 percent — since 1985, peaking in 1995 and declining each year after to a figure two times higher than 1985. The number of white victims increased slightly, while the numbers of American Indian and Asian victims were consistent over the study period. Four percent or less of victim racial information was missing each year.

More than half of all victims were male — between 58 and 75 percent from 1985 to 1997. Female victimization grew only slightly over the study period. The number of male victims rose steadily until 1995 and then declined. Each year, less than 3 percent of the data on the victim's sex was missing.

Youth under 18 were not a large percentage of homicide victims — 9 to 20 percent. Juvenile victimization did not fluctuate greatly over the 13-year period. The largest proportion of juvenile victims was 20 percent in 1996. The number of adult victims followed the same pattern as murders statewide, reaching a high point in 1995, then receding. Victim age information was missing in zero to 2 percent of cases per year.

In terms of a single age, most victims between 1985 and 1997 — 4 and 3 percent, respectively — were either age 20 or children less than 1 year old. Seventeen percent of all

murder victims from 1985 to 1997 were 14 or younger and 6 percent were 65 or older.

Comparing age groups, homicide victims were slightly older than their offender counterparts. Individuals ages 20 to 24 or 30 to 34 made up the highest proportion of victims in nine of the study years, totaling from 14 to 19 percent of all victims. In 1985, 1990 and 1993, most victims were either ages 25 to 29 or 35 to 39, whereas in 1994, 15- to 19-year-olds were the majority of victims, at 18 percent. Proportions for most age groups fluctuated and did not increase considerably. Groups showing a growth in their share of all victims were those ages 15 to 19, 20 to 24 and 25 to 29. Most other age groups declined or stayed about the same.

Victims of gun-related homicides were concentrated within the demographic categories of white, male and over age 18. In seven of the study years, whites accounted for 48 to 72 percent of gun victims. African Americans, however, equaled the highest percentage of victims in 1990, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997, totaling from 43 to 57 percent of firearm-related homicides. Comprising between zero and 7 percent of gun-related murders, Asians made up the smallest share of victims. The largest proportions of firearm homicides for African Americans and Asians occurred in 1995, when these two groups accounted for 57 and 7 percent, respectively, of all victims. Sixty-four to 86 percent of firearm victims each year were male, and 78 to 96 percent were adults. Fewer than 22 percent of victims murdered by guns each year from 1985 to 1997 were youth under age 18.

Comparing age groups, young adults between the ages of 20 and 24 were more likely to be the victims of a gun-related murder, accounting for 15 to 26 percent of all victims. Individuals in the 15-to-19 and 25-to-29 age categories comprised the next largest proportions of firearm murder victims overall, at 16 and 15 percent each. These three age groups each have made up larger shares of firearm-related homicides since 1985, while proportions for other groups have declined. From 1985 to 1997, children younger than age 5 comprised 1 percent of all gun-related murders.

Firearms were a major factor in most victim groups

Murder weapon use varied by victim group. Across all racial groups, except American Indian, a majority of victims from 1985 to 1997 were murdered with guns. African Americans and Asians had the largest proportions — 63 and 65 percent each — of firearm-related homicides

compared to other racial groups. These two groups also experienced an elevated number of handgun murders: over half of all victims in these groups were killed with this firearm type. Knives followed firearms for both African Americans and Asians. Forty-three percent of white victims died through the use of a gun and 29 percent by other weapons such as hands, fists or feet, blunt objects, poison or strangulation. Other weapons, at 36 percent, accounted for the highest share of American Indian victims, followed by knives at 34 percent. Both American Indians and whites had a greater proportion of homicides committed with blunt objects and personal weapons of hands, fists, feet or other body parts.

Guns were a factor in more than half of the murders of males and adults from 1985 to 1997. In addition, more than 40 percent of male and adult victims of murder were killed by handguns. Knives comprised the second largest portion, at about one-quarter each for males and adults. Other weapons caused the demise of most females and juveniles — 35 and 30 percent, respectively. In fact, personal weapons accounted for more than twice as many homicides in these two groups than in males and adults. Firearms followed other weapons for female as well as juvenile victims, at 35 and 37 percent, respectively.

About seven out of 10 victims ages 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 were killed by firearms. Sixty-two percent of 10- to 14-year-olds also were victims of this weapon type. More than half of the murders involving people 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 were handgun-related, as were 48 percent in the 10- to 14-year-old group — figures higher than those of other age groups. The proportion of gun murders decreased gradually by age from 60 percent for victims ages 25 to 29 to 30 percent for those ages 65 and older. Firearms were, however, the leading cause of homicide for all age groups except children younger than 10. Forty-six percent of victims under age 5 were killed by means of personal weapons, while most homicides of 5- to 9-year-olds — 38 percent — were due to knives.

Victims and offenders were usually of the same demographic group

Across all categories, offenders targeted victims of the same race. Nine out of 10 white offenders between 1985 and 1997 killed whites. Seventy-one percent of African Americans, 64 percent of American Indians and 57 percent of Asians murdered individuals within their racial group. Within racial categories, Asian offenders had a higher proportion of African American victims than other races. Almost three-fourths of both male and female homicide offenders targeted male victims. Juvenile and adult

offenders were prone to have adult victims, at 75 and 86 percent, respectively. Almost twice as many juvenile as adult offenders, however, had juvenile victims. Offenders and victims within each age group tended to be of the same category as well. These findings were consistent over the 13-year period.

Whites comprised more than half of the victims in almost every circumstance category. Victims of murders involving narcotic drug law violations and gangs from 1985 to 1997 were most often African American. A greater share of Asian victims than those of other races were victims of robbery-related murders. American Indian victims were more likely to be involved in alcohol- or drug-induced brawls. African Americans were less likely to die in arguments with family members, while Asians were less

Circumstances varied for female and male victims of homicide from 1985 to 1997

	Female victims	Male victims
Alcohol- or drug-induced brawl	6%	94%
Argument over money or property	19	81
Argument with a family member	63	37
Argument with a nonfamily member	24	76
Arson	61	39
Burglary	61	39
Child killed by the baby sitter	67	33
Circumstance unknown	26	69
Gangland killing	5	95
Institutional killing	0	100
Juvenile gangland killing	13	88
Larceny	0	100
Lovers' triangle	18	82
Motor vehicle theft	0	100
Other crime (type unknown)	44	56
Other noncrime (type unknown)	43	56
Other sex offenses	50	50
Prostitution and commercialized vice	75	25
Rape	87	13
Robbery	11	89
Sniper attack	67	33
Suspected relationship to a crime	40	60
Violation of narcotic drug laws	10	90

Note: "Other crime" circumstances are situations in which the offender committed the homicide while engaging in another crime such as kidnapping or vandalism. "Other noncrime" circumstances describe murders that occurred during such situations as a car accident or a barbeque, or at a shopping mall. Analyses were completed on data for the combined years of 1985 to 1997.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

likely to be killed in arguments with nonfamily members. Whites had a much smaller proportion of gang-related murders than other races. The majority of homicides in each race group were due to arguments with nonfamily members or unspecified noncrime activities.

While males made up the majority of homicide victims, certain circumstances involved a higher percentage of females. A preponderance of murders in situations including arguments with family members, arson, burglary, prostitution and rape, as well as children killed by the baby sitter, had female victims. Homicides related to robbery, narcotic drug law violations and arguments with nonfamily members involved a much larger share of males. Among age groups, homicides due to robbery gradually gained in percentage as victims got older, especially among those age 45 and older. This also was true for murders resulting from arguments with family and nonfamily members. The former grew in frequency with age primarily for groups age 40 and over, while the latter rose for ages 10 and up. Children younger than 5 were the only victims of baby sitter-caused deaths.

More than half of homicide victims knew their offenders

Most homicide victims were friends or acquaintances of their offenders. Thirty-three to 52 percent of victims from 1985 to 1997 had this relationship with their assailant. Overall, from 54 to 70 percent of victims each year were either acquaintances, friends, intimate partners or family members of the offender. Stranger relationships comprised between 11 and 26 percent each year. The smallest share of homicides occurred among other family members such as in-laws, accounting for less than 1 percent to at most 4 percent. A high percentage of victim-offender relationships could not be determined: 10 to 31 percent over the 13-year period.

Proportions of relationships did not fluctuate greatly between 1985 and 1997. In each of the categories of intimate relationship, immediate and other family members, and strangers, the proportions fell over the study period. Victims of murders involving friends or acquaintances as well as unknown relationships grew by no more than 11 percent each to comprise a greater share of homicides during the same time reference; by 1997, these categories equaled 46 and 30 percent, respectively.

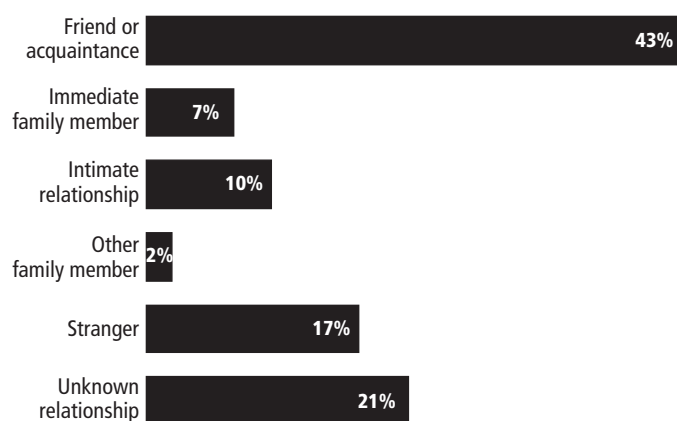
Among the categories of race, sex and age, victim-offender relationships were not alike in all instances. The largest percentage of relationships in each group between 1985 and 1997 was friends or acquaintances. Compared to other

racers, however, whites were more apt to encounter offenders who were intimately known to them, immediate family members or strangers. Asians also had a higher proportion of murders involving immediate family members and strangers but a smaller share committed by friends or acquaintances. African Americans were much less likely than other racial categories to be murdered by an immediate family member.

Males were the majority of victims in most relationship categories over the study period, except in intimate relationships such as spouse or partner. Almost eight out of 10 victims intimately known to their offender were female. Women also made up the greater share of victims of homicide by immediate family members such as parents or siblings. Murders involving acquaintances and strangers claimed a higher proportion of male than female victims. Homicides by immediate family members was the only category in which juveniles, rather than adults, were the majority, with 57 percent. Murders of adult victims had a bigger portion of intimate relationships and strangers than those involving victims under age 18.

A look at age groups and victim-offender relationships combined data for 1985 to 1997 reveals additional distinctions. Victims age 40 and older had a higher percentage of intimate relationship homicides. Individuals age 15 and older were more likely to have been murdered

Four out of 10 murder victims between 1985 and 1997 were friends or acquaintances of the offender



■ Only 17 percent of all victims of homicide from 1985 to 1997 were strangers to the assailant.

Note: This graph shows data for the victim-offender relationship, which describes the victim's relationship to each offender involved in the homicide incident.

Source: Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

by acquaintances and strangers. Those under 15, on the other hand, had elevated proportions of murder by immediate family members.

Firearms were not the most prevalent weapon used in every relationship classification from 1985 to 1997. Less than 8 percent of victims who were other family members such as aunts, uncles or grandparents of the offender were killed with guns. At 31 percent, knives were used most often in homicides committed by other family members. Although accounting for the majority of homicides, guns caused only 30 percent of the murders of immediate family members. Personal weapons followed at 22 percent, a number twice as large as the proportion for any other relationship group. In fact, when compared across relationships, about 40 percent of the murders involving sons and daughters resulted from personal weapons. Guns were used in more than half of acquaintance and stranger murders, as well as in 46 percent of those in which the victims and offenders were intimately known to each other; knives were the second most common weapon in these groups. Acquaintance and stranger murders had a much larger proportion of handgun homicides than other relationship situations, with more than four out of 10 caused by this firearm type. Overall, 48 percent of victims who knew their offender were killed with a firearm. The greatest shares of handgun and firearm homicides occurred where the victim and the offender were strangers.

Homicides related to theft activities — including the offenses of burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft and robbery — were more likely to involve strangers. Forty-four percent of such circumstances involved victims who did not know their offender. More than half of murders resulting from arguments with family members involved intimate relationships. Most other circumstance groups involved victims and offenders who were friends or acquaintances.

About homicide data

Supplementary Homicide Report incident-level data is voluntarily submitted by law enforcement officials nationwide through the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting program. Information collected through Supplementary Homicide Reports does not include deaths caused by traffic fatalities, accidents or suicides. Attempts to kill are considered aggravated assaults.

A Minnesota homicide data file for 1985 to 1997 was acquired from the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension at the Minnesota Department of Public Safety. Information provided through Supplementary Homicide Reports is distinct and cannot be linked to data contained in other types of databases or tracked from the incident through subsequent activity in the justice system. The Criminal Justice Center worked with the BCA to account for discrepancies in the data file; therefore, totals for various groups and subgroups may not match those published by the BCA in its annual report, *Minnesota Crime Information*. There also is a significant amount of unknown data across various categories. Missing information may influence yearly changes in activity.

One incident of homicide may comprise multiple victims and multiple offenders. Detailed demographic data regarding each is recorded. Additional incident elements documented include victim-offender relationship, circumstance, weapon used and situation. Incident characteristics are determined through police investigation.

Age, sex, race and ethnicity data is recorded for all victims and offenders. If any of these attributes are unknown, they may be estimated by examining the victim-offender relationship. For example, an incident involving a woman murdered by her husband and son would record the victim-offender relationship as "wife" and "mother." Race and ethnicity are treated as two different elements and are recorded for each victim and offender. A person of Hispanic descent may be of any race. Ethnicity data was not presented in this report, since a significant portion of this information was missing each year for both offenders and victims.

Racial and ethnic data should be examined carefully because of the varying circumstances under which it is documented. For example, birth records contain the child's race or ethnicity based on that of the mother, regardless of the father's race or ethnicity. These characteristics also may be recorded from observation or self-identification or may

reflect social custom rather than heredity. Moreover, research controlling for factors such as education level, family status, income, housing density and residential mobility has shown that race and ethnicity are not predictive of criminal behavior.

The victim-offender relationship should be recorded for each offender involved in an incident. After examination of the data file, it appears that this information is not always recorded correctly, most often in multiple-victim and multiple-offender situations. Law enforcement officials may simply repeat the same code for all victims involved — in most cases, the first victim listed — or may not record all victim relationships. For example, an incident involving two victims and two offenders should have a total of four victim-offender relationships listed, but law enforcement officials may have provided only two.

Further miscoding also was noted regarding the situation. In some cases, true single victim-unknown offender situations were listed as having a single offender. Law enforcement officials sometimes indicated that offender information was unknown when only a portion of demographic information was missing. Other situations with only one offender were occasionally recorded as multiple-offender incidents.

Caution must be exercised when analyzing the database file provided by the BCA. It should be reviewed record by

Minnesota 1997 county population data

County name	Percent of state total	County name	Percent of state total
Aitkin	0.3%	Marshall	0.2%
Anoka	5.6	Martin	0.5
Becker	0.6	Meeker	0.5
Beltrami	0.8	Mille Lacs	0.4
Benton	0.7	Morrison	0.7
Big Stone	0.1	Mower	0.9
Blue Earth	1.2	Murray	0.2
Brown	0.6	Nicollet	0.6
Carlton	0.7	Nobles	0.5
Carver	1.1	Norman	0.2
Cass	0.5	Olmsted	2.4
Chippewa	0.3	Otter Tail	1.2
Chisago	0.7	Pennington	0.3
Clay	1.2	Pine	0.5
Clearwater	0.2	Pipestone	0.2
Cook	0.1	Polk	0.7
Cottonwood	0.3	Pope	0.2
Crow Wing	1.0	Ramsey	11.1
Dakota	6.3	Red Lake	0.1
Dodge	0.4	Redwood	0.4
Douglas	0.7	Renville	0.4
Faribault	0.4	Rice	1.1
Fillmore	0.5	Rock	0.2
Freeborn	0.8	Roseau	0.3
Goodhue	0.9	St. Louis	4.5
Grant	0.1	Scott	1.3
Hennepin	23.6	Sherburne	1.0
Houston	0.4	Sibley	0.3
Hubbard	0.3	Stearns	2.7
Isanti	0.6	Steele	0.7
Itasca	0.9	Stevens	0.2
Jackson	0.3	Swift	0.2
Kanabec	0.3	Todd	0.5
Kandiyohi	0.9	Traverse	0.1
Kittson	0.1	Wabasha	0.5
Koochiching	0.4	Wadena	0.3
Lac qui Parle	0.2	Waseca	0.4
Lake	0.2	Washington	3.4
Lake of the Woods	0.1	Watonwan	0.3
Le Sueur	0.5	Wilkin	0.2
Lincoln	0.2	Winona	1.1
Lyon	0.6	Wright	1.6
McLeod	0.7	Yellow Medicine	0.3
Mahnomen	0.1	State total	4,685,549

Note: Percentages are based on July 1, 1997, estimates.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Minnesota 1997 demographic information

Sex	Percent of state total	Race	Percent of state total
Female	50.6%	African American	2.8%
Male	49.4	American Indian	1.2
		Asian	2.5
		White	93.4
Age group		Age group	
Under 1	1.3%	35 to 39	8.9%
Under 5	6.7	40 to 44	8.3
1 to 4	5.4	45 to 49	7.0
5 to 9	7.4	50 to 54	5.5
10 to 14	7.8	55 to 59	4.3
15 to 19	7.6	60 to 64	3.6
20 to 24	6.2	65 and older	12.3
25 to 29	6.6	Adults	26.7
30 to 34	7.8	Juveniles	73.3

Note: Percentages are based on July 1, 1997, estimates. This estimate may differ from previously reported data due to differences in the information source used.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

record. In some cases, victims and offenders in the same incident were not paired together, especially single victim-multiple offender and multiple victim-single offender situations. Incidents are identified by law enforcement ORI identification number, incident number and incident date. The complex method of identifying incidents precludes simply sorting the data file to link offenders and victims.

Forty-four circumstance categories including “unknown” are available for law enforcement officials to record on the Supplementary Homicide Report form. The circumstance describes the events surrounding or leading up to a homicide. Coding of this category may be inconsistent since many descriptions overlap. For example, one incident of homicide may have been argument-related and involved narcotic drug law violations and gang members; each of these descriptions is available for law enforcement officials to cite as the homicide circumstance, but only one can be recorded on the form. In addition, the lack of complete information about the incident will narrow the circumstance classification. The FBI does not provide definitions for the circumstance codes available; therefore, misinterpretation of categories may further weaken the information. Data fluctuations from year to year may be more a reflection of differences in law enforcement documentation techniques than actual changes in activity.

The true extent of alcohol and drug involvement in homicide incidents cannot be measured with this data set.

These substances may have been a factor in a larger number of murders; however, circumstance categories overlap, and chemical use by offenders and victims is difficult to ascertain since this information is not documented on reporting forms. In addition, only one circumstance code links use of alcohol or drugs to the incident: “alcohol- or drug-induced brawl.” Revision of the form to include this information would increase understanding of the elements contributing to the occurrence of homicide. Additional information on offenders and victims such as mental stability, education level and socioeconomic status also is not included on reporting forms. The Traffic Accident Report form, which requires alcohol- and drug-related information to be documented, as well as other reporting forms could be used as models for modifying the Supplementary Homicide Report.

Study of other areas not examined by this project also could expand knowledge on the incidence of homicide. Social events occurring over the 13-year period as well as shifts in population, changes in legislation, differences in law enforcement practices, gang activity or drug dealing in certain areas and other factors may have influenced the rate of homicide in Minnesota, as well as across the nation. Concentrating on activities within or around particular geographic locations may serve to pinpoint the prevalence of homicide in one area compared to another.