BACKGROUND

The Pennsylvania Violent Death Reporting System (PAVDRS) collected death certificate data about 749 homicide deaths (608 males and 141 females) from 49 counties in 2017. PAVDRS also collected reports from coroners/medical examiners and law enforcement partners in 24 of the counties, including: Adams, Allegheny, Armstrong, Berks, Blair, Carbon, Chester, Clinton, Delaware, Fayette, Forest, Greene, Indiana, Jefferson, Lancaster, Lehigh, Luzerne, Montgomery, Northampton, Philadelphia, Schuylkill, Westmoreland, Wyoming and York*. PAVDRS worked closely with the Bureau of Health Statistics and Registries, coroners, medical examiners, and law enforcement to gather detailed information about each violent death. Below are some results of those collaborations.

In 2017, more than 14 homicide deaths occurred every week in Pennsylvania.

Characteristics of Homicide Victims

Sex of Victims:
- Data from the 24 counties showed that males were over 4 times more likely to die by homicide than females. Nationally, males die by homicide at a rate of approximately four times that of females1, 2.
- Overall, homicide rates in Pennsylvania were similar to the national average:
  - Pennsylvania Rates: 6.2 deaths per 100,000 population (males 10.1 and females 2.3).
  - National Rates: 6.2 deaths per 100,000 population (males 9.8 and females 2.5)1, 2.

Age of Victims:
- The majority of homicides occurred among individuals aged 0-19 and 20-29 years.

Leading Cause of Homicide Deaths by Sex:
- Firearms were the leading cause of homicide deaths, accounting for 68% of all homicides.
- Other causes included sharp instruments, blunt instruments, suffocation, and poisoning, each contributing less than 10% of the total.

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Most Common Relationships Between Victims and Perpetrators:

- Missing data: 4%
- All others: 29%
- Acquaintance: 5%
- Stranger: 5%
- Girlfriend or boyfriend: 3%
- Spouse: 3%
- Child: 2%
- Friend: 2%
- Ex-girlfriend or ex-boyfriend: 1%
- Parent: 1%
- Ex-spouse: <1%

Most Common Precipitating Circumstances:

- Missing data: 8%
- Precipitated by another crime: 25%
- Walk-by assault: 17%
- Drug involvement: 14%
- Victim used weapon: 1%
- Drive-by shooting: 4%
- Lover's triangle: 2%
- Physical fight between 3 or more people: 2%
- Victim was a bystander: 1%
- Victim intervened to help a crime victim: 2%
- Random violence: 1%
- Gang-related: 1%
- Prostitution-related: 1%

*Death certificates were also collected from Beaver, Bedford, Bradford, Bucks, Cambria, Clarion, Columbia, Crawford, Cumberland, Dauphin, Erie, Franklin, Huntingdon, Lackawanna, Lawrence, Lebanon, Lycoming, Monroe, Perry, Pike, Potter, Somerset, Union, Washington, and Wayne counties. Death certificates from all 49 counties represent 92% of all suicide deaths in Pennsylvania. The content of this report does not represent the entire state of Pennsylvania. More counties are anticipated to report in 2018.


The PAVDRS program is a state level surveillance system funded and overseen by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It is part of the larger National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS). There is a Violent Death Reporting System in all 50 states and some US territories. The PAVDRS program collects data on suicides, homicides, deaths of undetermined intent, and accidental firearm deaths. The program is required to collect data directly from death certificates, coroners/medical examiners, and law enforcement. These sources contribute to a comprehensive understanding of each violent death. PAVDRS/NVDRS data is used for research, policymaking, and, ultimately, to develop violence prevention programs and strategies that will enhance community safety. For more information about the PAVDRS program, please call 717-787-5900 or email RA-DHPAVDRS@pa.gov

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