

# DATA BRIEF: Violence in Allegheny County

After peaking at almost 60 per year in the late 2000s, homicides in Allegheny County fell to an average of about 40 per year by the end of 2012. Such low levels had not been seen since the 1980s. Yet, while violence in the region has been on the decline in recent years, homicide rates in the City of Pittsburgh (14 per 100,000) and Allegheny County (six per 100,000) remain higher than the national average. For example, in 2011, the latest data available, the national homicide rate was approximately five per 100,000 people. It should be noted that homicide rates in major cities and urban counties tend to be higher than national averages.

To put this in a national perspective, Pittsburgh's homicide rate ranks alongside cities such as Indianapolis, Cleveland and Milwaukee; is half that of high-crime cities such as Baltimore and Detroit; and is nearly twice that of Minneapolis and Denver.

More than half of the homicides in Allegheny County took place in the city, and men with guns were responsible for the majority of them. Since 2000, men have committed 89 percent of homicides in Allegheny County. About 80 percent of the time, a firearm was their weapon of choice. An argument led to the homicide in 38 percent of cases in which the motive was known, and robbery/burglary was the motive in 21 percent of the cases in which motive was known.

The majority of homicide offenders and their victims were young, male and disproportionately African American. For example, 61 percent of those murdered in Pittsburgh and 68 percent of the offenders arrested from 2000 through 2012 were under the age of 30. Some 86 percent of homicide victims since 2000 were men. And 86 percent of city homicide victims were African American. Among offenders, 78 percent were male and African American. Given such grim statistics, it is not surprising that the average homicide rate for young African American men in Pittsburgh is more than 65 times the national average.

Most homicide offenders knew their victims; victim and offender knew one another in close to 80 percent of cases in which relationships were known. The most common recorded relationship was acquaintance or friend.

For the most part, homicide victims were not unfamiliar with criminal activity. More than 50 percent had been involved in the juvenile justice system and/or jail before their deaths. And a significant percentage of victims had a history of involvement in human services. The services that the largest percentage of those victims received were related to behavioral health, followed by involvement in the child welfare system.

Although City of Pittsburgh residents comprise only 25 percent of the county population, over half of all homicides from 2000 through 2012 occurred in the city. Homicides were concentrated in specific areas in both the county and the city; from 2005 through 2011, 39 percent of county homicides occurred in just five of the 129 county municipalities while 54 percent of city homicides occurred in just 21 of the city's 92 neighborhoods.