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# Homicide in black families: A quantitative analysis of trends and patterns in the United States

Margaret Susan Plass

*University of New Hampshire, Durham*

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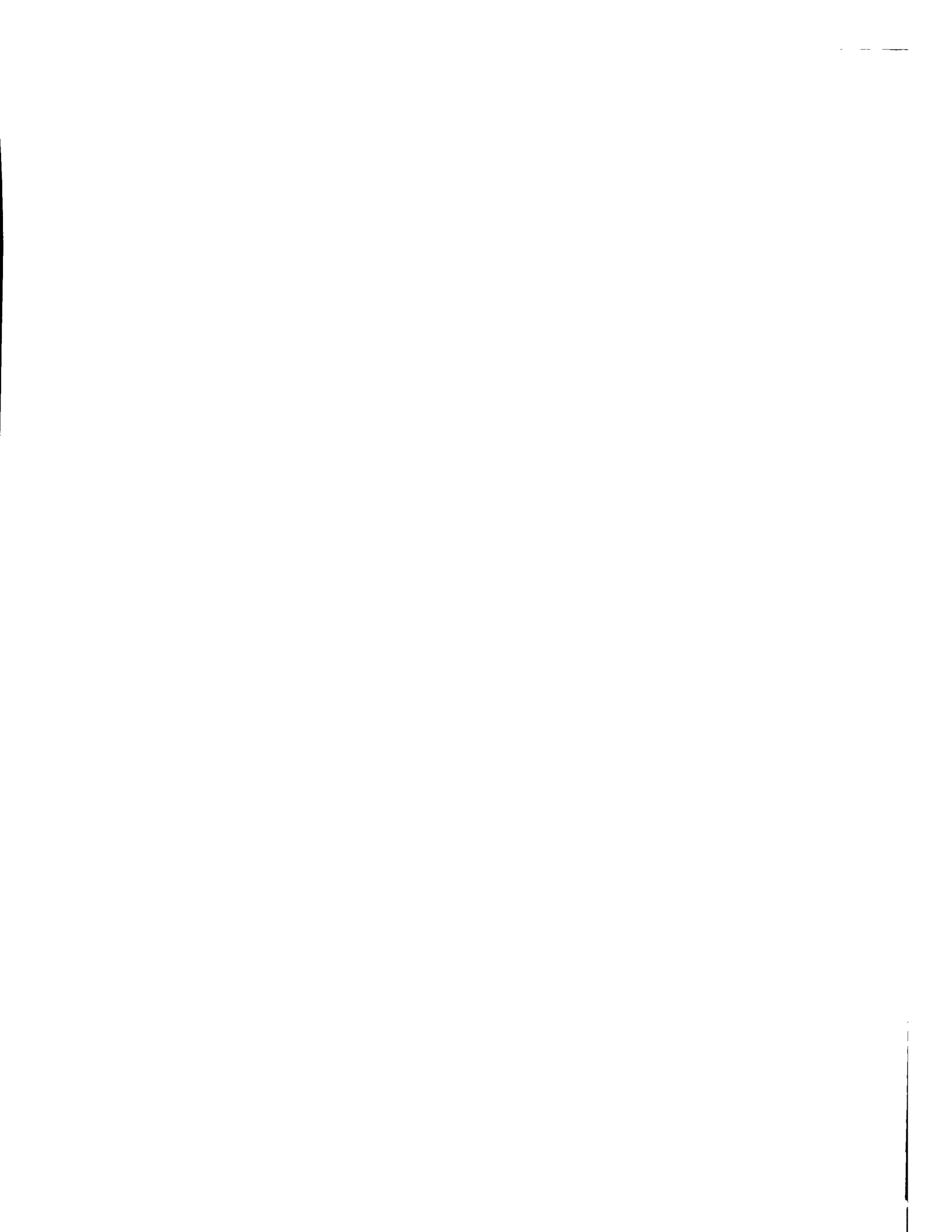
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**Plass, Margaret Susan, Ph.D.**

**University of New Hampshire, 1990**

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HOMICIDE IN BLACK FAMILIES:  
A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN THE  
UNITED STATES

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
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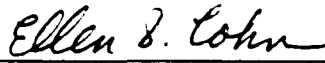
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This dissertation has been examined and approved.




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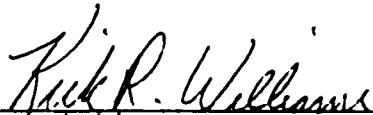
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ABSTRACT

HOMICIDE IN BLACK FAMILIES:  
A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN THE  
UNITED STATES

by

Peggy S. Plass  
University of New Hampshire, December, 1990

Little homicide research has been done which is both race, and victim/offender relationship specific. This dissertation provides such an analysis, with a quantitative description and analysis of murders which occurred between black family members in the United States between 1976 and 1987.

Data for this project was obtained from the FBI's Supplemental Homicide Report. The first half of this dissertation examines patterns (and time trends) of family, acquaintance, stranger, and spouse, parent, and child homicide rates for blacks in America in terms of variables such as age, gender, weapons and circumstances.

Many of the most interesting descriptive patterns discovered related to the gender variable. For example, black women were found overall to have relatively larger levels of involvement in family homicide events (relative to the involvement of men) than in other relationship categories; black women were less likely to be victims of spousal homicide than were black men (with other research finding the opposite gender pattern holding for whites). In addition, examination of time trends

found that family homicides among blacks show greater levels of change, i.e., they are less static, than are acquaintance or stranger murders.

The second half of the dissertation involved the construction of a regression model, predicting variation in black family and non-family homicide rates across a sample of 86 American cities. While many of the same variables were useful in predicting both relationship types of homicide (e.g., measures of income deprivation) there were some notable differences. For example, a Southern regional variable had no effect on the rate of non-family homicide, but was negatively related to the incidence of family homicide among blacks. The percent of black children living with two parents was a positive predictor of family homicide, and a negative predictor of non-family homicide. Finally, the non-family homicide rate accounted for only an additional 8% of the variance in the rate of family homicide when other factors were controlled for.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Little Rock, Ark.-"Onesa Williams, 82, was killed with one shot in her chest during an argument over the way \$5 was spent. Her husband, Luther Williams, 93, has been charged with her murder"  
(Transformation, 1990).

Memphis, TN--Caroline Parks was arraigned today on charges of murder stemming from the September 7 beating death of her son, Cortez Parks, age 18 months  
(Commercial Appeal, 1990).

The victims of the homicides in the events cited above had two things in common with a great number of other murder victims in the United States. First, both were black--the FBI estimates that about 45% of homicide victims in America are African Americans, while blacks comprise only about 12% of the total population. Second, both were killed by members of their own families. About 16% of homicide victims in the United States are killed by relatives (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989; FBI, 1987). This is a study about the large number of murder victims which fall into these two categories, i.e., about the incidence of family homicides among black Americans.

This first chapter is intended to provide the reader with an understanding of the importance of this research, and to provide a justification for disaggregating the homicide rate on the basis of both race and victim/offender relationship. What can be gained by a project

aimed at the analysis of such a specific type of homicide victimization? Why is it important to undertake the study of homicides which occur specifically in black families? How can such a study be performed? These are the questions which will be dealt with in this section. An examination of the present state of knowledge about race and relationship specific rates of homicide victimization serve as a reasonable starting place for the explanation of the importance of this work.

### 1.1 The Importance of Racial and Relationship

#### Disaggregation of Homicide Rates

##### 1.1A Racial Disaggregation

Racial differences in the occurrence of homicide have long been recognized and debated over in the social science literature. For most of this century, in fact, criminologists and other social scientists have documented the fact that blacks in America experience considerably higher rates of lethal violence than do whites (Hackney, 1969; Hawkins, 1986B; Lottier, 1938; Shannon, 1954; Silberman, 1978). Today, it is widely accepted that American blacks have a higher homicide rate than any other racial/ethnic group, and homicide has actually become the leading cause of death for young black men (O'Carroll and Mercy, 1986).

Most of the research which has dealt with the relationship between race and homicide has employed overall homicide rates (i.e., not race specific) and has focused on such issues as the connection between a population's racial composition and its rate of overall homicide (Blau and Blau, 1982; Loftin and Hill, 1974; Messner, 1983; Williams, 1984)). Work in this vein has strongly suggested that there is a link between

race and homicide--the percent of the population which is black is consistently found to be a significant and positive predictor of homicide rates. However, empirical research aimed at disclosing why this relationship exists or identifying factors which may be responsible for the widely disparate ways in which white and black Americans experience involvement in homicide is more rare.

In fact, in spite of the obvious seriousness of the problem for black Americans, there has been what criminologist Darnell Hawkins calls "a lack of systematic, detailed analysis of the phenomenon, including attention to intra-group distribution and patterning of the crime among blacks" (Hawkins, 1986, p. 6, emphasis added). Many of the issues surrounding the explanation of the high level of disparity between homicide rates for American blacks and whites might be simplified by considering such intra-group, i.e., racially disaggregated, homicide rates. Given the magnitude and scope of the problem of lethal violence as it effects blacks, such analysis of racially specific homicide rates is quite important, both for efforts to effect a decrease in this loss of human life among blacks, and for efforts to understand the etiology of homicide in general.

#### 1.1B Relationship Disaggregation

A similar area of neglected study in the homicide literature can be found by examining murders occurring in a specific victim/offender relationship category. While it has been noted for some time that homicides occur at differing rates between individuals with different personal relationships, and that most murders occur between people who know one another (often intimately so) relatively little attention has

been given to the analysis of homicides by victim/offender relationship. Most of the work in this vein which does exist is descriptive in nature and very few attempts at multi-variate analysis aimed at explaining variations in relationship specific types of homicide exist.

The importance of victim/offender relationship as a distinguishing feature for homicide events has been fairly well documented. Humphrey and Palmer, for example, write, "To understand human interaction, it is necessary to analyze the structure of the basic dyadic relationship between the victim and his offender" (Humphrey and Palmer, 1986, p. 58; see also Schafer, 1968; von Hentig, 1948; and Wolfgang, 1958). Grouping homicides together on the basis of victim-offender relationship allows for the consideration of a set of incidents which have, presumably, a number of commonalities. All homicide events are not the same. A psychopathic serial killer who stalks and murders numerous victims is quite different from a man who shoots a victim in the course of committing a robbery, who is in turn quite different from a man who stabs his wife in the course of an argument. The etiology of all these types of homicide is, assuredly, quite different as well. Any discussion of "homicide rates" without efforts to distinguish between different types of homicide can thus be complicated by considering what may well be quite different phenomenon. Focusing on one type of homicide at a time can simplify and sharpen efforts at explanation.

There are several reasons for choosing family over other relationship categories (e.g., acquaintance or stranger) for consideration here. Although the majority of homicides in America occur between acquaintances, the homicide rate between family members is also



quite high, even higher than that for stranger homicides for some groups (Plass and Straus, 1987). The relatively high rate of homicides which occur in the family contradicts popular images of what both family life and homicide are like. The family relationship network is at the heart of social life for most Americans, and when serious violence occurs in the family setting, it is assuredly one of the most socially disruptive events possible. It is crucial that we understand why and how murder occurs between family members, so that we might be better prepared to prevent it, and so that we might have a more realistic (and useful) picture of what American homicide is like.

In addition, studying homicides which occur in families can add to understanding of non-lethal violent interactions which occur in families. Most homicides that occur between family members are not isolated events, but rather the culmination of a long period of non-lethal violent interaction (Straus, 1986). In some ways, then, family homicide can be seen as the most severe end of the continuum of family violence. Patterns of family homicide may correspond to patterns of the most severe (and socially harmful) forms of family violence, and the study of such homicides may well be useful in guiding research and public policy in the (non-lethal) family violence field as well.

The choice of family as a category of relationship for examining racial differences in homicide is also important. While some research has shown blacks to experience higher levels of violence in the family than do whites (e.g., Cazenave and Straus, 1979; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980) the issue of violence which occurs specifically in black families has not been adequately addressed. Asbury (1987) for

example, notes with regard to the treatment of women of color in the mainstream spouse abuse literature that,

the literature typically addresses the issue of (race) in one of three ways: by failing to mention the race of the women included, ...by acknowledging that only European-American women are included, ...or by including some women of other ethnic groups but not in proportions comparable to their numbers in the national population (Asbury, 1987, pp. 90-91).

Thus, as stated above, examination of homicide in black families could be a much needed aid in understanding other points on the continuum of violence which occurs in these families as well.

Finally, there are discrepancies in patterns of family homicide between blacks and whites which are different from those found between the races for other relationship categories (see Plass and Straus, 1987). Typically, overall patterns of black homicide coincide with those for whites, simply occurring at a higher rate (but with similar patterns in terms of things like gender or age involvement). Preliminary research has revealed that in at least one instance, spousal homicide, patterns for black homicide are quite substantively different from those for whites. Plass and Straus (1987), in analysis of family homicides from 1980-1984, find that while among whites, women are almost twice as likely to be victims of spousal homicide than are men, for blacks, men are slightly more likely to be killed by their wives than are women by their husbands. Thus, it seems that blacks may be experiencing family homicide in very different ways from whites, and that these differences are ones not only of quantity (as is the case for overall patterns of homicide).

There is a fairly large body of literature regarding differences between black and white families (e.g., Moynihan, 1965; Staples and Mirando, 1980; Staples, 1985; Willie, 1985), and the analysis of family homicide presented here will both be informed by and contribute to knowledge about family life as well as to that about patterns of lethal violence among blacks.

One of the reasons for the lack of research dealing with race and/or relationship specific rates of homicide is the difficulty in obtaining data. It is largely through the richness of the data set used here, the Comparative Homicide File, that this research was made possible. Thus, having pointed out the importance of disaggregating the homicide rate on these bases, it is now appropriate to move to a description of the data set which makes this research possible.

### 1.2 Making Disaggregation of Homicide Rates

#### Feasible--The Comparative Homicide File

The Comparative Homicide File is derived from the Supplemental Homicide Reports (SHR) collected annually by the FBI. The SHR contains detailed information on both victims and perpetrators in each homicide event which occurs in America in a given year. This information allows for, among other things, the classification of homicides according to the relationship between victim and offender, an obviously crucial element of this project. In addition, the SHR provides information regarding the race, gender and age of victims and perpetrators, along with classifications regarding the circumstances of the precipitating event and weapons used.

The calculation of homicide rates from the SHR is complicated by two problems, and it is through compensating for these difficulties that the SHR is made into the Comparative Homicide File. First, the reporting agencies occasionally fail to submit monthly SHR forms to the Uniform Crime Reports office. This non-reporting can range from a partial year of coverage to a total absence of data for a given year. In any case, the result is that rates calculated from SHR data will be underestimated in areas with non-reporting. Fortunately, the UCR office provides adjusted counts (i.e., "estimated totals") of homicide victims in Crimes in the United States (see, e.g., F.B.I., 1980:342-346). Thus, the extent to which the number of victims in the SHR underestimates the total number of victims in the UCR can be estimated for any given year. A weighting procedure, therefore, was devised for rate calculations which compensates for non-reporting in the SHR. Specifically, data were weighted by the ratio of total homicide in the UCR for the time periods in question to the total number found in the SHR (see Williams and Flewelling, 1987, for a full discussion of this procedure).

The second difficulty arises from the fact that among the homicide incidents reported, information on the victim/offender relationship is often missing (for about 25% of the incidents, on the average). Such missing data can result in underestimation of relationship specific rates. This problem was addressed by using an adjustment procedure that incorporates such missing data in the rate calculations.

The general strategy of the adjustment procedure is to extrapolate the characteristics (e.g., relationship) of the known cases to those with missing information. Within this general strategy, the adjustments

were determined and applied separately on the basis of the nature of the precipitating event. For example, felony events with missing victim/offender relationship data were classified according to the distribution of felony events with known relationships. This refinement of the general strategy, therefore, takes advantage of what is known about precipitating events of incidents with missing information on victim/offender relationship, yielding more accurate estimates of relationship specific homicide rates (again, see Williams and Flewelling, 1987, for a more detailed description of the procedure).

The Comparative Homicide File, then, provides a weighted and adjusted version of the "raw" data found in the Supplemental Homicide Reports. The great detail recorded with regard to characteristics of victims and perpetrators in the SHR along with the compensations made for missing data, make the CHF a uniquely rich data file. The accuracy and detail with which homicide rates can be calculated from this file are unrivalled by that available from any other data set. For all these reasons, the CHF is an excellent resource for the computation of family homicide rates, and for the examination of racial patterns in family homicide proposed here.

The homicide rates presented in this section, as well as those used later in the multivariate analysis, are derived from a subset of the total number of homicide events recorded in the SHR. First, justifiable homicides and negligent manslaughters are excluded from this analysis, which focuses only on murder and non-negligent manslaughter. These two latter types of homicide constitute the overwhelming majority of murders in America (about 95%). Thus, the term homicide is used throughout this

project to refer to events of intentional killings (i.e., murder and non-negligent homicide).

Secondly, the homicide incidents analyzed herein are limited to those involving a single victim and a single perpetrator. There are two reasons for excluding multiple victim or perpetrator events. First, one-on-one homicide incidents do represent 89% of homicides in the United States. Focusing on these incidents is important because previous descriptive analyses of homicide have shown that the characteristics of victims and offenders in one-on-one incidents differ from those involving multiple victims or offenders (Block, 1981). Thus, the two types should be kept separate for analytical purposes until the causal dynamics can be sorted out.

In addition, there are certain technical aspects of the data which preclude the use of incidents involving multiple offenders and/or victims. For example, in incidents with multiple victims, the SHR provides information only on the relationship between the first victim and each offender. Likewise, in events involving multiple offenders and victims, information is available only about the relationship of each offender to the first victim, not to all subsequent ones. Thus the web of relationships between all of the parties involved in a multiple homicide event is often quite complicated, and the determination of the relationship between (multiple) victims and perpetrators is often difficult--if not impossible-- to determine. The data presented here, then, are single victim/single assailant murder and non-negligent manslaughters.

It is also important to note that all of the rates calculated for this project are victimization rates, i.e., the numerator is always the number of victims in any given sub-group. While it would have been possible to calculate perpetration rates as well, this is not done here, partly in the interests of simplifying the presentation of data, and helping the reader to avoid being overwhelmed by too much information. In addition, specifying perpetration rates, especially in a discussion of family homicides, is not necessarily a great deal more enlightening, as the identity of the offender is implicit in most of the victimization rates for family members (e.g., the offender in a spousal homicide is always the husband/wife of the victim). Finally, it is important to note that this is a project which seeks to examine the patterns of victimization among black and white family members, and the chief questions at issue are those pertaining to victimization patterns.

A note as to the time breakdowns employed here is also appropriate. The CHF contains data covering a twelve year period (1976-1987). Trend data over all twelve years will be examined on broad levels (e.g., family-acquaintance-stranger; spouse-parent-child). Each increasingly specific section, in fact, begins with a presentation of time trends for blacks and for whites across the 12 year period.

More detailed information, i.e., rates involving multiple criterion variables (e.g., race, age, gender, and relationship) will be presented as an average rate for the years 1980-1984. There are a number of reasons for employing this five year time span in the more detailed levels of description. Reporting data over a twelve year period can become cumbersome and even confusing. The first five years of the 80s

were chosen first because they are in the middle of the full twelve years of data available. In addition, it is this time period which will be used in the multi-variate analysis which will follow, (as it is close enough to 1980--a census year and source for independent variables used in the analysis--to be meaningful). Finally, a five year time aggregation was used to reduce the influence of random aberrations in year-to-year estimates. The final formula for the calculation of rates from the 1980-1984 time period presented here, then, is as follows:

$$\text{Homicide rate} = ((I/P) * 100000)/5,$$

where I is the total number of weighted and adjusted incidents of murder and non-negligent manslaughter of a specific type (e.g., black family) and P is the total population of the United States (or relevant race or gender specific subpopulation totals). The division by five indicates that the rates were calculated over the 80-84 period and then expressed on an average per year basis.

Finally, before moving on to present any data, it is important to acknowledge that, in spite of all its strengths, the CHF data file is not without problems. As is true of any official aggregate data source, there are undoubtedly numerous errors in the ways in which homicide events were recorded. There are two major areas of concern which are most pertinent to consider in the present context. First, is the issue of non-reporting, in terms of homicides which are never discovered, either because the bodies of victims are never found, or because their deaths are wrongly classified as accidents or the like. This may be a major issue in the examination of child homicides, as the murders of some small children killed by their parents could presumably be



classified as accidents, and thus never be counted as homicides at all. In addition, the data which is contained in the CHF, even while it may be an accurate portrayal of police files, is not always necessarily an accurate portrayal of the events as they occurred. For example, the identity of offenders as recorded in the CHF (a crucial element in calculating relationship specific homicide rates) is recorded at the time the crime is investigated. This is not necessarily the same as a conviction for these crimes, but rather are based on police arrest data. Thus, one might be arrested for killing one's spouse, but later be acquitted in a court proceeding, and such acquittals are not reflected in the CHF data. Nevertheless, in spite of such shortcomings, the CHF, because of its procedures for weighting and adjusting data (as explained above), offers the most accurate picture available of homicide in the United States.

### 1.3 Defining Relationship Categories

Finally, before presenting any data from the CHF in the next chapter, it is necessary to define some of the relationship terms which will be used here.

Family homicides include the following victim-offender relationships: husband, wife, common-law husband, common-law wife, father, mother, step-father, step-mother, son, daughter, step-son, step-daughter, brother, sister, in-law, ex-husband, ex-wife, and "other family relationship".

Acquaintance homicides are those occurring between the following relationships: friend, acquaintance, employee, employer, boyfriend,

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girlfriend, neighbor, homosexual relationship, and other known to victim.

Stranger homicides occur between people who do not know one another.

Spouse homicide victims, as defined in this project, include husbands, wives, common-law husbands, common-law wives, ex-husbands and ex-wives.

Parents include mother, father, step-mother and step-father relationships.

Child homicide refers to a relationship and not to the age of the victim. Thus, child homicide victims in the context of this project are individuals of any age (including adults) who are killed by a parent or step-parent.

While most of the classifications of these specific relationships are fairly straightforward, there are two instances in which this is not the case. Thus, an extra word of explanation is merited on the inclusion of ex-spouses in the "family" and in the "spousal" homicide category, while "girlfriend/boyfriend" relationships are put into the acquaintance homicide category.

Ex-spouses were included in the family category, even though these people are no longer legally considered "family" or "spouses" for a number of reasons. first, ex-spouses are people who assuredly did share a life and a common household and who did live as a family for at least some period of time. It is also possible that ex-spouses still retain some family ties through, for example, the presence of children. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that many women killed by ex-

spouses are those who have divorced an abusive husband, only to be killed by him later. Thus such murders can be seen as a playing out of a violent dynamic which began in a marital relationship.

Dating partners, or "girlfriend/boyfriend" relationships were not included in the family or the spouse category of homicides. This decision was made in spite of recognition of the familial or spouse-like quality many such relationships may have, for a number of reasons. First, dating partners are not bound by any legal or even necessarily normative bonds of kinship--they are, strictly speaking, not family. The complexity here comes from the fact that it is quite possible that many of the dating partners in the CHF may have in fact lived together, for at least some period of time, without being married, or had other lifestyle characteristics in their relationship which made it quite similar to a spousal (or family) one. The fact that such non-marital cohabiting is a more common form of life among blacks than among whites (Cherlin, 1981) makes this definitional issue even more important here. At least in theory, however, homicides occurring between "girlfriends/boyfriends" who live together should have been classified as common-law spouses (which are included in the family-spouse category). This is not to discount the possibility of error among individual police officers who made the decisions as to how to categorize victim/offender relationships for the SHR report form. However, because there is no way to identify such cases of error, or to pinpoint more exactly the nature of the relationship between a "girlfriend" and "boyfriend", and even while recognizing the fact that some homicides in this category may actually have been more spouse-like

than not, a decision was made to use a more conservative definition of these as acquaintance relationships. Having described the data used here, and the means of classification used for defining relationship categories, we will now proceed to examine patterns and trends in black family homicides. The following two chapters will present basic descriptive data on racial patterns and trends in family homicide on two different levels. Chapter 2 examines the broad categories of family, acquaintance, and stranger homicides and Chapter 3 deals with the more specific spouse, parent, and child types of killings.

There is ample justification and much to be gained from an examination of homicides in black families. This analysis will be approached in two ways here. The first half is comprised of a detailed description of national trends and patterns of family homicide victimization rates among black Americans. The second section presents structural models, aimed at identifying factors which explain variations in black family and non-family homicide in a sample of 86 American cities. What are the basic demographic patterns of family homicide among blacks in the United States? Are some groups (e.g., men or women, young or old) more at risk for some relationship types of homicide? What are the ways in which family homicides as a general category are different from black murders which involve non-family member? Are there significant differences in patterns and trends of specific types of family homicides (e.g., spouse, etc.) among blacks? Are patterns, trends and predictive factors for black family homicide the same as those for non-family homicide? What structural variables best explain variations in homicides involving black family members?

Finally, is there reason to think that family homicide is a qualitatively different phenomenon from non-family homicides among blacks? These are the questions which will be addressed in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER 2

### FAMILY, ACQUAINTANCE, AND STRANGER HOMICIDE PATTERNS AMONG BLACK AMERICANS

This chapter describes racial patterns in three broad relationship types of homicide, namely, those committed by family members, by acquaintances, and by strangers. It is important to consider how family homicide is similar to and different from other relationship types of homicide. What are the patterns of family homicide victimization among blacks in terms of things like age and gender of victims, weapons used, and precipitating circumstances? Are there significant demographic differences in the patterns of homicide victimization for blacks killed by family members and those murdered by non-family members? Are family homicides different in terms of the type of weapons used, or in the precipitating circumstances under which they occur? These are the type of questions which will be examined in this chapter. The first three sections will focus on demographic patterns of victimization, examining homicide victimization occurring between family, acquaintance, and strangers by race, by race and gender, and by race, gender, and age. The last three sections will focus more on elements of the homicide event itself, focusing on patterns of victimization for the three relationship types over time, by weapon, and by circumstance. We will begin with a very basic examination of homicide victimization only by race and victim/offender relationship.

## 2.1 Black Family, Acquaintance, and Stranger

### Homicide Victimization

Figure 2.1 provides a picture of family, acquaintance, and stranger homicide victimization rates<sup>1</sup> for black Americans. The rates provided in Figure 2.1 (and in subsequent tables and graphs in this chapter) are yearly averages for the 1980-1984 period, unless otherwise specified (see Chapter 1 for the actual formula used in computing these rates).

The most striking aspect of Figure 2.1 is the considerably higher rate of homicide victimization occurring between acquaintances, as compared with either family or stranger murders. The acquaintance homicide victimization among blacks of 17.16 per 100,000 is almost three times higher than either the family or stranger victimization rates, and is in fact greater than the family and strangers rates combined. Fifty-eight percent of all black homicide victims are killed by acquaintances.

The victimization rates for blacks killed by family members and by strangers are nearly identical (6.3 and 6.35 per 100,000, respectively), with family murders being very slightly more common. Roughly 21% each of all black homicide victims are killed by family members or by strangers.

The fact that the majority of homicide victims are killed by acquaintances is consistent with other literature regarding patterns of homicide victimization. One is obviously most at risk for victimization at the hands of those with whom one has contact, and the number of our acquaintance relationships is likely to exceed those of kin, and we are likely to spend more time with those we know than with strangers. Other research has certainly also found that individuals are more likely to be

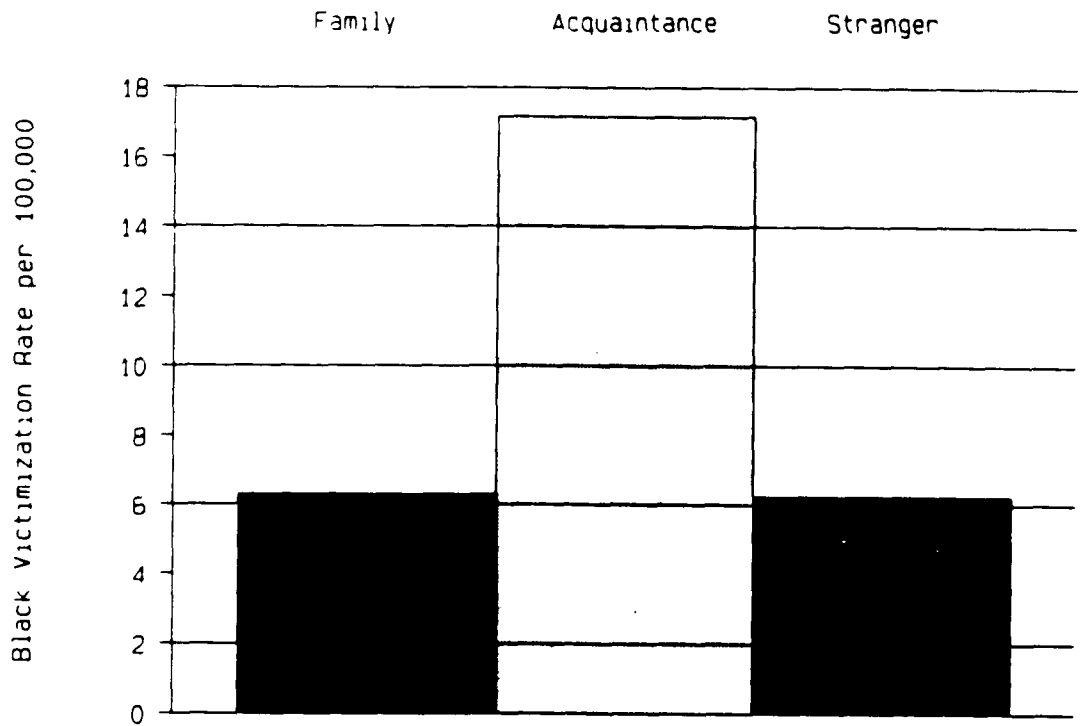


Figure 2.1 Family, Acquaintance and Stranger Homicide



killed by an acquaintance than by persons of any other relationship (Wolfgang, 1958; Block, 1981; Humphrey and Palmer, 1986). In explaining this, Humphrey and Palmer note,

"The more individuals rely on certain relationships for their self-worth, and social support, the greater the potential for devastating emotional harm. It is against those persons who significantly affect an individual's self-esteem that deadly violence is typically directed" (Humphrey and Palmer, 1981: 58).

Thus, there are some plausible reasons why this data should show a pattern of higher concentration of homicide victims killed by people known to them.

While people of both races are most likely to be killed by acquaintances, the pattern of homicide victimization for blacks in family and stranger murders is somewhat different from that for the white population. Plass and Straus (1987), using data from the same time period as that examined here, found that while acquaintance murders were the most common type of homicide for whites, stranger homicides occurred at a somewhat higher rate than did family murders. In addition, Humphrey and Palmer (1986), using data from 1972, 1976, and 1977 in North Carolina, found that among white Americans, stranger homicides were considerably more common than were family murders, while this pattern was reversed for blacks, with victims being considerably more likely to be killed by family members than by strangers. On the national level, the data here indicates that blacks apparently differ somewhat from the total and from the white population with respect to the likelihood of being killed by strangers as opposed to family members, with the tendency toward family murders being slightly greater.

In summary then, this examination of the data at its most basic level reveals the following:

- 1) Acquaintance homicides are most common for blacks, with 58% of all black murder victims being killed by persons in this relationship category.
- 2) Family and stranger victimization rates for blacks are virtually identical, and comprise about 21% each of all black homicide victimizations. This trend is slightly different from that found in other research for total and for white populations in America in the same time period.

## 2.2 Patterns by Gender

The fact that the majority of participants in homicide events, both victims and offenders, are male is well documented (e.g., Luckenbill, 1984; Wilbanks, 1984; Wolfgang, 1958). Is this pattern of general homicide one which is also found in relationship specific types of murder? Are there differences in rates of victimization for black men and women in family, acquaintance, and stranger homicides? This section will examine such questions as these.

The top two lines of Table 2.1 show homicide victimization rates for black men and women for family, acquaintance, and stranger murders. Both genders are most likely to be killed by acquaintances. The non-gender specific pattern of victimization among blacks described above, i.e., that family and stranger homicides occur at nearly identical rates, disappears when gender is taken into account. Black men are considerably more likely to be killed by strangers than they are by

Table 2.1 Black Family, Acquaintance, and Stranger  
Homicide Victimization Rates (per 100K)  
by Gender 1980-1984

Gender of Victim	Type of Homicide		
	Family	Acquaintance	Stranger
Male	8.48	29.38	11.66
Female	4.33	6.22	1.40
Ratio M/F	1.96	4.72	8.32

acquaintances, while black women are almost four times more likely to be killed by family members than they are by strangers. The third line of Table 2.2 shows the ratio between black male and female victimization rates for the three relationship types of homicide. The ratio between victimization rates for black men and women in the three types of homicide is most similar for family homicides, and most disparate for stranger killings. The rate of homicide victimization for black males is almost twice as great as that for females in family murders, almost 5 times as great for acquaintance killings, and more than 8 times as great among stranger homicides. Thus, black men are more at risk than black women for all three relationship types of homicide, with the rates of victimization between the genders being most similar, however, in the area of family killings.

Even though black women have a lower victimization rate than do black men for every type of homicide, their level of involvement in lethal violence is still quite high. Although as stated above, homicide has been found to be largely a male phenomenon, other research has shown that black women have a higher rate of homicide victimization (and offense) than do white men (Harvey, 1986; Mann, 1990; Wolfgang, 1958). It is as if the "threshold" of violence, so to speak, is higher for blacks than for other Americans. The fact that black women are more likely to be victims of homicide than are white men merely underscores this high threshold of violence. Thus, even though (presumably through the influence of socialization) American women have less involvement in violence than do men overall, the influence of race overshadows this

characteristic among the so-called gentler sex. Harvey writes of this high level of involvement in homicide for black women,

...Black women have to contend with the reality that their social status is very low. They face the double discrimination of racism and sexism and the manifestation of these two forces is felt in various ways, so that they feel the anger, frustration and disappointment of second class citizenship from two perspectives. Given these factors, the lower incidences of homicide among Black women than among Black men is likely due to socialization, which in America denies to females the sanction of aggressive behavior (Harvey, 1986, p. 167).

Finally, it is interesting that the lowest ratio of male to female victimization for blacks occurs in the context of family murders. These ratios between male and female victimization rates among blacks can again be compared with the findings of Plass and Straus (1987) regarding gender patterns for the total population by victim-offender relationship. While Plass and Straus also find that men are more likely to be victims of all three types of homicide, the ratio of male to female family homicide victimization among the total population is lower (1.2). Other research, using similar data, has found that among whites women are actually slightly more likely to be victims of family homicide than are men (Straus and Williams, 1988) Thus, the data presented here suggests that black women (as compared to black men) are actually less likely to be victims of family homicide than is found in either the total population or in white populations. The fact that white women have higher victimization rates for family homicide than do white men, while black women are less likely to be victimized than their male counterparts corresponds to patterns by gender corresponds to Plass and Straus' (1987) findings regarding patterns of spousal homicide for

blacks and whites in America. It is likely that the family homicide rate may well be dominated by rates of spousal killing (as the most common type of murder within the family). An examination of more specific relationship categories of homicide within the family, presented in Chapter 3, will be essential in further unraveling this interesting finding, and a more detailed discussion of potential causes for this higher involvement of black women in family homicide will be offered at that point.

In summary, the examination of race and gender patterns in family, acquaintance, and stranger homicide for the period 1980-1984 seems to suggest the following:

- 1) Black men are more likely to be victims of homicide than are black women in all three relationship types of murder.
- 2) Both black men and black women are most likely to be killed by acquaintances. In comparing family and stranger homicide victimizations, black men are more likely to be killed by strangers, while black women are more likely to be murdered by members of their family.
- 3) The ratios between black male and female homicide victimization are greatest for stranger homicides (where men are killed at a rate 8 times that of women) and smallest for family homicides (where the rate for men is not quite twice as great as that of women). When comparing this pattern with other research on relationship specific homicide for the total population

or for white men and women, black women are relatively less likely than black men to be killed by family members (as compared to gender ratios for the total and white populations).

### 2.3 Patterns by Age and Gender

The influence of age on homicide victimization is fairly well established. In general, homicide apparently "peaks" among people in their mid 20's to early 30's, with rates of victimization steadily falling among older populations (Straus and Williams, 1988; Wilbanks, 1984). Is this a pattern which holds for all relationship types of homicide for blacks? Is age a factor effecting any of the gender patterns of homicide for the three relationship categories? This section will examine such questions.

Table 2.2 provides victimization rates for black men and women for the three relationship categories of homicide by age. The pattern noted in the previous section of higher victimization rates for black men than for black women in family killings, with the exception of those aged 0-14, does not seem to be a function of age. For not only family, but the two other relationship types of homicide as well, black men in every age group over 14 have higher rates of victimization than do black women. In the 0-14 age group, however, for family, acquaintance, and for stranger homicides, black women have higher victimization rates than do black men. Thus only in the youngest age groups are black women more at risk than black men for homicide victimization in the family, or in other relationship categories.

Table 2.2 Black Family, Acquaintance, and Stranger  
Homicide Victimization Rates (per 100K) by  
Gender and Age 1980-1984

Age of Victim	Family		Acquaintance		Stranger	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
00-14	1.45	1.94	.93	1.25	.28	.37
15-19	2.73	1.09	20.31	5.66	9.44	1.29
20-29	11.64	6.47	57.00	12.83	25.05	2.31
30-39	17.44	8.73	62.00	11.36	22.04	2.35
40-49	14.50	6.21	42.28	6.78	13.36	1.42
50-59	11.84	3.91	31.27	3.28	11.33	1.10
60+	7.23	3.07	16.17	3.31	7.71	1.49



For all three types of homicide, victimization rates are lowest among the youngest age groups, steadily rise to a peak, and then begin a gradual decline among older ages. The peak victimization period for both black men and women in family homicides occurs in the 30-39 year old age group. Black men are most at risk for acquaintance homicide in their 30's, while black women have their highest acquaintance homicide victimization rate in their 20's. For stranger homicides, black men are most at risk during the 20-29 year old age group, while the stranger victimization rate for women is nearly the same for the 20-29 and 30-39 year old group (being slightly higher for women in their 30's). For both genders, then, in all three relationship types of homicide, the "age of greatest risk" are the 20's and 30's, the same years during which we see the overall homicide rate among the total population peaking (Wilbanks, 1984).

The highest victimization rate for black men in any relationship type of homicide is that of 62 per 100,000 occurring among 30-39 year olds killed by acquaintances. Black women also experience their highest rate of homicide victimization at the hands of acquaintances, but in the 20-29 year old group.

The highest victimization rates for both men and women of any age group occur among acquaintance murders, with two exceptions. Both male and female blacks aged 0-14 are more likely to be killed by family members than by others. The fact that the youngest age groups for both genders are most likely to be killed by family members is probably a result of the relatively limited amount of contact this youngest group has with people outside of the family. During these early years, the

intensity of contact (and thus the relative risk for homicide) with only family relationships, as opposed to those outside of the family (which, presumably, would increase with age), is much greater for this youngest age group. In addition, black women aged 50-59 have family homicide victimization rates that are slightly higher than those for murders by acquaintances. Overall, however, the pattern of greatest risk for victimization in acquaintance relationships appears to persist, regardless of age or gender of victim. This preponderance of acquaintance homicides for most age groups for both genders is not unexpected, given the much greater rate of victimization overall among blacks at the hands of acquaintances.

Comparing the stranger and family homicide rates by age and gender, black women in every age group are more likely to be killed by family members than they are by strangers. This is the same pattern which was found for non-age specific homicide rates in the previous section. Thus, no age effect is apparent in the greater tendency for black women to be killed more often by family than by strangers.

In the previous section, black men (without reference to age) were found to be more likely to be murdered by strangers than by family members. This is also the case for 4 of the 7 age groups examined here (15-19, 20-29, 30-39 and over 60). However, among black men aged 0-14, and 40-59, the risk of homicide in the family is greater than is that at the hands of strangers. Some age effect does, then, appear to be present in these patterns of victimization for black men.

The greatest disparity between victimization rates for men and women in family homicide comes in the 50-59 age group, where black men

are killed at a rate 3.02 times higher than that of black women. For acquaintance homicide, the greatest difference by gender again is among murder rates for 50-59 year olds, with men in this age group being killed 9.53 times more frequently than women. Finally, among stranger homicides, black men aged 20-29 have victimization rates 10.84 times that of black women of the same age.

The most similar homicide rates for men and women among all three types of killings occur in the youngest age group (0-14), where girls are killed at a rate about 1.3 times that of boys for family, acquaintance, and stranger murders.

In the previous section, comparing total age populations of black male and female victimization, the most similar ratios between victimization rates for the two genders were found in the family homicide category, while the difference was greatest in stranger killings. Age of victim does not appear to have an effect on this pattern, as the male/female victimization ratio for all age groups is greatest among stranger victimizations, and smallest for family murders.

In general, homicide victimization for black Americans in the three relationship types of homicide are quite similar to the patterns of overall homicide victimization by age in the total population. For each relationship category, for both genders, homicide victimization follows the familiar "normal curve" pattern by age, that is, it gradually rises to a peak in the 20's or 30's and gradually decreases thereafter.

The patterns of homicide victimization among black men and women by age are also quite similar for the three relationship categories. As stated above, each relationship category shows a similar "normal curve"

of victimization by age. With one exception (found among the 0-14 year old males and females, who are most likely to be killed in a family context), men and women of all age groups are more likely to be killed by acquaintances than by any other relationship category.

In summary, then, the most significant findings with regard to variations in patterns of homicide victimization for black men and women by age are as follows:

- 1) Black men and women experience their lowest rates of homicide for all three relationship categories in youngest age groups, with the rate generally peaking somewhere in the 20's or 30's, and then beginning a steady decline among older populations.
- 2) The higher rate of victimization for black men than that for black women in family homicide does not seem to be a function of age, as for all age groups, with the exception of 0-14, black men are killed at higher rates than are black women in the family context.
- 3) The pattern of greater risk of victimization for black women in family than in stranger homicides found in the previous section is not effected by age, as all age groups of black women are more likely to be killed by family members than they are by strangers.
- 4) The pattern of greater risk of victimization for black men in stranger than in family homicides found in the previous section does seem to be effected somewhat by age. Among 10-14 year olds, and 40-59 year olds, the

victimization rate for black men is greater in family homicide than it is from stranger killings.

- 5) The ratio between male and female homicide victimization rates is, for all age groups, smallest in family homicides, and greatest for stranger homicides.

#### 2.4 Time Trends 1976-1987

Homicide victimization rates do, of course, vary across time. In general, homicide rates in the United States reached an all time high in 1980, and have been fairly steadily decreasing since (FBI, 1984). Are some relationship types of black homicide more static (i.e., experiencing smaller rates of change) than others? Do peak and low points of homicides between family, acquaintance, and strangers occur at or near the same years? These are the type of questions which will be examined in this section, which provides yearly homicide rates<sup>2</sup> by race and victim-offender relationship for the period of 1976-1987.

Family, acquaintance, and stranger homicide rates for the 12 year period are graphed on separate charts (as the magnitude of acquaintance homicide rates tends to flatten out the family and stranger plots if all three types of homicide are shown on the same graph). Figure 2.2 shows the rate of family homicide victimization for blacks over the 12 year period. The peak year for family homicides is in 1976, with a fairly steady downward trend thereafter. The low point for family homicides occurs in 1985. Acquaintance homicides, shown in Figure 2.3, peak in 1980 and reach their low point for the period in 1984. Figure 2.4 shows that stranger homicides were highest in 1981, and lowest in 1984.

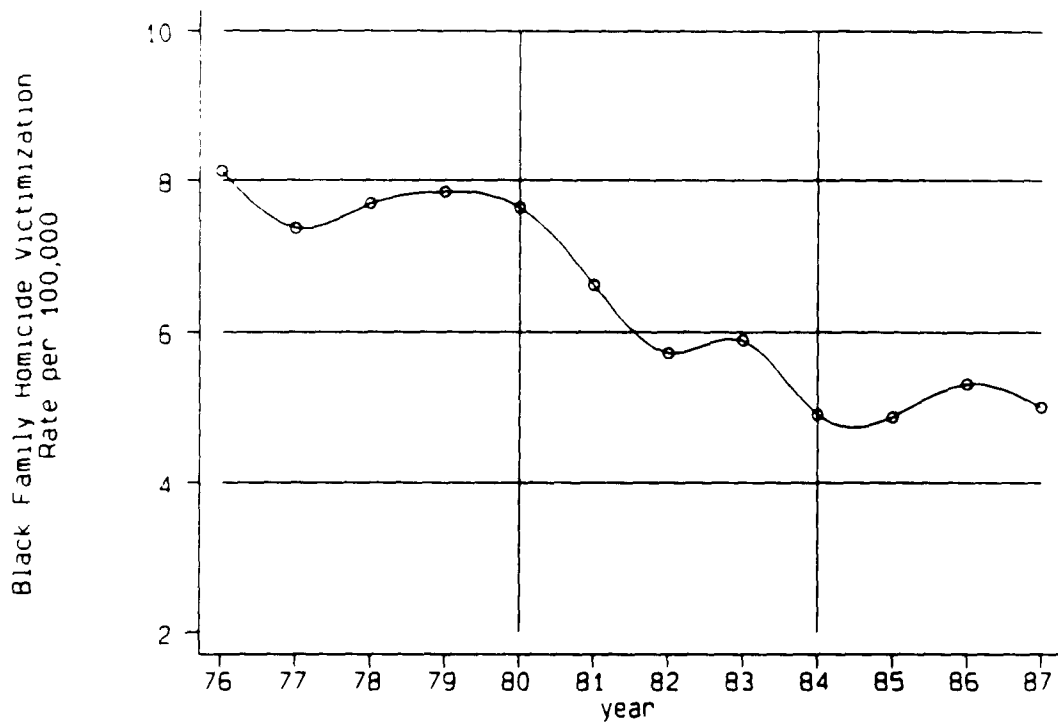


Fig. 2.2 Family Homicide Victimization 1976-1987

Black Acquaintance Homicide Victimization  
Rate per 100,000

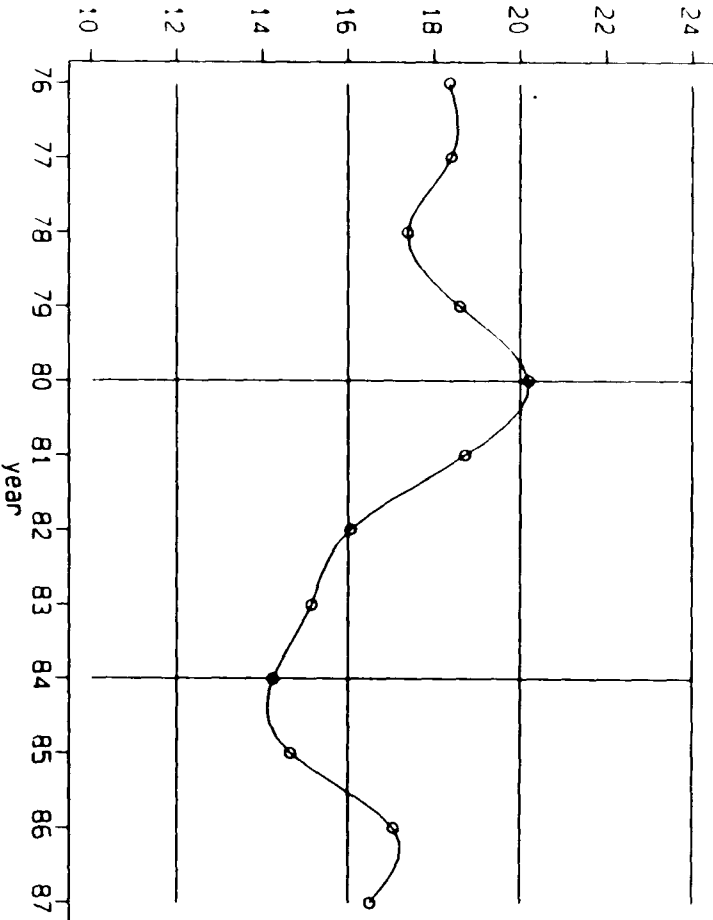


Fig. 2.3 Acquaintance Homicide Victimization 1976-1987

Black Stranger Homicide Victimization  
Rate per 100,000

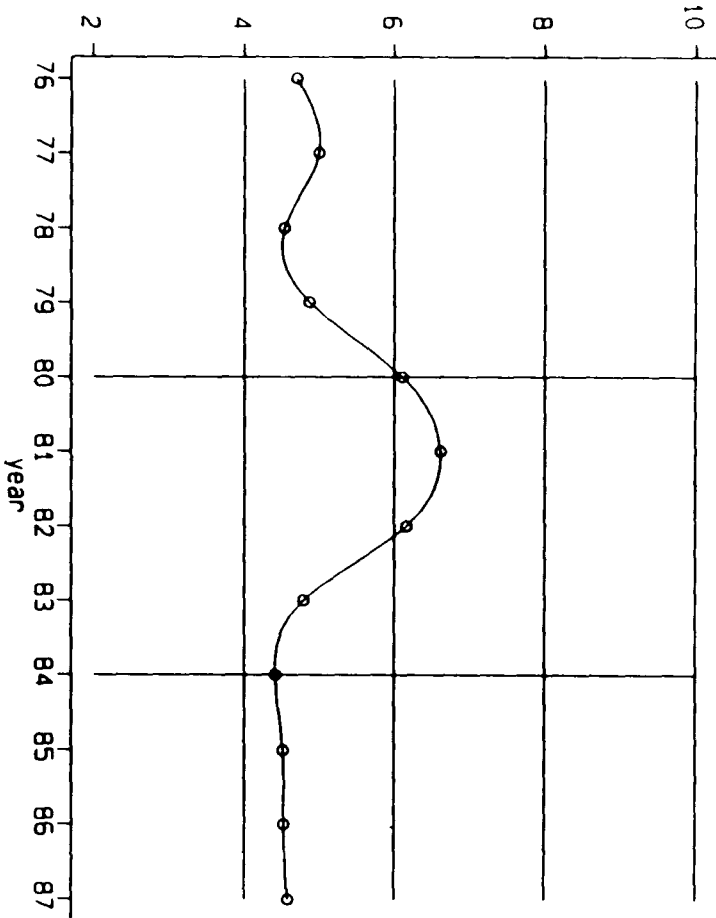


Fig. 2.4 Stranger Homicide Victimization 1976-1987



Acquaintance homicide rates are consistently higher than those for other relationship categories throughout the 12 year period. In fact, the lowest acquaintance victimization rate of 14.25 (in 1984) is actually higher than the peak victimization rates for either family (8.13 in 1976) or stranger (6.62 in 1981) victimization rates. Examination of the time trend data does, however, sharpen the difference between family and stranger murder rates. Blacks were more likely to be killed by family members than by strangers in every year except for 1980 (when the rates are the same) and in 1981. Thus the tendency for family murders to be slightly more common than stranger homicides among blacks is even more apparent when the data is examined on a year-to-year basis.

The pictures of homicide rates for the three relationship categories look quite different. Family rates among blacks show a steady downward trend across the 12 year period. Acquaintance murders rise, then fall, then rise again in the late eighties. The stranger homicide plot is more similar to that for acquaintances than it is to that for family murders. Stranger homicides show a considerable rise in the middle of the graph (around the early 1980's), and then fall again to a fairly static level in the mid to late years of the period.

Similarities and differences in the ways in which the three relationship types of homicide changes over time can be further examined in Table 2.3. In Table 2.3, the range of homicide for each of the three relationship categories is shown, along with the percentage of change between peak and low points in the twelve year period. The percentage of change is highest for family homicides (67%), followed by stranger

Table 2.3 Peak and Low Homicide Victimization Rates per  
100K for Black Family, Acquaintance, and  
Stranger Homicides 1976-1987

Homicide Type	Peak Rate (year)	Low Rate (year)	% Change
Family	8.13 (1976)	4.87 (1984)	67%
Acquaintance	20.20 (1980)	14.25 (1984)	42%
Stranger	6.62 (1981)	4.40 (1984)	50%

homicides (50%), with acquaintances having the lowest rate of difference between peak and low points (42%).

The fact that the largest rate of change is found for family homicides is especially interesting in light of Straus' primary group lag thesis (1987). Straus suggests that the family homicide rate overall tends to be more static than other relationship types of homicide, with any changes in family murders lagging behind those for other types of victimization. Empirical research has found some support for this concept, using data which is not race specific (Williams and Plass, 1987). However, the situation seems to be strikingly different for blacks in the 76-87 period, where black family homicides actually show the largest rate of change. Straus makes the argument that family homicide rates are less affected by structural changes than are other homicide rates, a reason for their relatively static rate of change over time. The time trend data presented here seem to suggest, first, that the black family homicide rate may be more likely to be affected by such structural changes than is the overall family homicide rate, or, perhaps even other relationship categories of black homicide. This indicates that black family homicides are different in some ways from family homicides in general, or from black acquaintance or stranger murders.

In summary, then, time trend data for black homicide victimization rates for the three relationship types of homicide shows that:

- 1) Family homicides peaked in 1976, while those between acquaintances and strangers reached their highest points in the early eighties (1980 and 1981, respectively). The lowest point for all three types of homicide came in the

mid 1980's (1985 for family, and 1984 for acquaintance and stranger murders).

- 2) Black acquaintance victimization rates are higher than those for either family or stranger murders for all 12 years. Family murder rates are at least somewhat higher than stranger for 10 of the 12 years examined here.
- 3) The range of victimization rates across time is greatest for family homicides, which show a 67% difference between peak and low points in the 1976-1987 period.

#### 2.5 Patterns by Weapon Used

The weapons discussed in this section are divided into four categories: (1) guns (includes unspecified firearms, handguns, rifles, shotguns, and "other" guns) (2) Knives and cutting instruments, (3) objects/personal weapons (personal weapons imply the use of hands, feet, etc.) and (4) "other" weapons (poison, defenestration, explosives, fire, narcotics, drowning, strangulation, asphyxiation). Do similar patterns of weapon use exist for the three relationship categories of homicide? Are some types of weapons relatively more common in on relationship category than in another? These are the types of questions which will be examined in this section.

Table 2.4 provides homicide victimization rates for blacks in the three relationship types of homicide by weapon used. The highest victimization rates for all categories of homicide are those in which guns were the weapon used. Knives or other cutting instruments are the second most widely used murder weapon for all three types of homicide. Objects and "personal weapons" (hands, feet, etc.) were the third most

Table 2.4 Black Family, Acquaintance, and Stranger  
Homicide Victimization Rates (per 100K)  
by Weapon Used 1980-1984

Weapon Used	Type of Homicide		
	Family (%)	Acquaintance (%)	Stranger (%)
Guns	3.57 (57%)	10.80 (63%)	4.40 (71%)
Knife	1.57 (25%)	4.36 (26%)	1.08 (17%)
Object/ Personal Weapon	.76 (12%)	1.44 ( 8%)	.52 ( 8%)
Other Weapon	.35 ( 6%)	.44 ( 6%)	.20 ( 3%)

common weapon used, while "other" weapons (includes poison, defenestration, explosives, fire, narcotics, drowning, strangulation, and asphyxiation) were used in the smallest number of homicides for all three types of relationships.

The fact that the majority of black homicide victims in all relationship groups are killed by guns is consistent with the pattern of homicide in the total population, where the majority of killings in the United States are perpetrated by use of firearms (see, e.g., FBI, 1989). A gun is a very deadly weapon, perhaps the most deadly of any of the weapon categories examined here. The use of a gun in an assaultive event increases the likelihood of a lethal result, while use of the other weapons examined here may be more likely to result only in injury rather than death. Blacks are therefore like the rest of the American population, in that they are most likely to be killed in all relationship contexts by guns.

While there is a marked similarity in the choice of weapons for all three types of homicide (i.e., victims killed by guns have the highest rates, followed by knives, objects, and other weapons for family, acquaintance, and stranger homicides), an examination of the percentage breakdowns according to weapon used for each relationship type of homicide reveals a more interesting pattern. A much larger percentage of black stranger murders are committed using guns (71% of all black stranger homicide victims) than are family ones (57%), with 63% of the acquaintance homicide victims being murdered with firearms. Likewise, black family homicide victims are relatively more likely to be killed

through the use of objects or personal weapons (12%) than are acquaintance (8%) or stranger (8%) victims.

Among black homicides, the use of firearms as murder weapons seems to increase as the level of intimacy in the relationship between victim and offender decreases. Thus we find that a little over half of family homicides, 63% of acquaintance and almost three-quarters of stranger killings among blacks are perpetrated with guns.

Also notable among black killings is the somewhat greater percentage of family homicides committed with objects/personal weapons. Twelve percent of family victims were killed in this manner, compared to 8% each of acquaintance and stranger victims. A gun is a relatively impersonal weapon. One need not be physically close to one's victim in order to kill with a firearm, in fact, one need not physically touch the victim at all. The use of knives and objects/personal weapons certainly require a greater physical proximity between victim and offender. Whatever the reason, the lower the degree of intimacy between victim and perpetrator, the higher the incidence of the use of guns as murder weapons.

In summary, then, the major findings with regards to patterns of weapon usage in family, acquaintance, and stranger homicides among blacks are as follows:

- 1) Guns are the most commonly used weapon in all three relationship types of homicide.
- 2) The percentage of homicides perpetrated by guns among blacks is lowest among family killings (57%) and highest for stranger murders (71%).

3) A slightly higher percentage of black family homicides (12%) are perpetrated with objects/personal weapons than are those for acquaintance of stranger killings (8% each).

#### 2.6 Patterns by Precipitating Circumstance

The circumstance under which a homicide occurs is an important piece of information in evaluating homicide events. The FBI's circumstance coding list has been broken down into five categories here: Index Crime and "other felony" circumstance (consisting of rape, robbery, burglary, larceny, car theft, arson, "other felony type" and "all suspected felony" ), Vice/gangs (composed of prostitution/commercial vice, other sex offenses, narcotic drug laws, gambling, abortion, gangland killing, juvenile gang killing, institutional killing, and sniper attack), 3) "Other non-felony" (a residual category in the FBI coding for murders which do not occur in the context of the commission of another crime, and also do not fit into any of the other possible coding categories), 4) Conflict/argument (composed of lovers triangle, brawl with alcohol, brawl with drugs, argument over money or property, and "other arguments"), and 5) Unknown circumstance. Do the precipitating circumstances in which black homicides occur in the three relationship groups differ? Are homicides among blacks in a given relationship category more likely to occur under one set of precipitating circumstances than another? These are the types of questions which will be addressed in this section.

Table 2.5 provides homicide victimization rates for blacks for the three types of homicide by circumstance. The majority of blacks killed



Table 2.5 Black Family, Acquaintance, and Stranger Homicide  
Victimization Rates (per 100K) by Circumstance  
1980-1984

Type of Circumstance	Type of Homicide		
	Family	Acquaintance	Stranger
Index Crime	.24	1.29	2.10
Vice/gangs	.02	.75	.17
Other Non-felony	1.24	1.85	.51
Conflict/Argument	3.99	10.60	1.42
Unknown	.80	2.60	1.98

either by family members or by acquaintances are murdered in the context of some sort of argument or conflict. Among stranger homicide victimizations, the highest rates are found in the Index crime category. Vice/gang and index crime circumstances are the least common type among family murders and acquaintance murders. Stranger homicides are least likely to occur in the context of vice/other crime circumstances.

The percentage of homicides in a given relationship category which occur in an argument/conflict context steadily decreases as the intimacy of the relationship between victim and offender decreases. Thus, argument/conflict homicides comprise 63.4% of all the family murders, 62% of the acquaintance killings, and 23% of the stranger homicides among blacks. In relationships with familiars, the motive for killing is logically most likely to be some sort of disagreement or conflict between the victim and the offender. In addition, the more intimate the relationship, the greater the likelihood that intense conflict will occur (Coser, 1956; Humphrey and Palmer, 1986).

A very small percentage of the homicides perpetrated in the context of the commission of an index crime offense fall in the family category. More than half of all the crimes in this category occur between strangers, with only about 6% occurring between family members.

In summary, then, the data regarding the circumstances under which homicides occur in the three relationship categories for blacks reveals the following:

- 1) Family and acquaintance murders are most likely to occur in the context of argument/conflict situations. Stranger

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homicide victimization rates are highest in the Index crime circumstance category.

- 2) The percentage of all homicides within a given relationship category which are perpetrated in the context of Argument/conflict decreases as the level of intimacy between the participants decreases. Thus, 63.4% of family, 62% of acquaintance, and 23% of stranger homicides occur in this circumstance category.

This chapter has reviewed a number of interesting findings with regard to the ways in which family homicide among blacks is similar to and different from non-family homicides. The next chapter will examine patterns in family homicide on a more in depth level. Just as the patterns of homicide in general are clarified by examining the broad level relationship between victims and offenders, so can one's understanding of "family homicide" be enhanced by exploring patterns of specific family relationship homicides. Chapter 3 will present descriptive data regarding murders which occur between spouses, those in which parents are killed by their children, and in which children are killed by parents. It is important to undertake this closer look at data regarding patterns in specific family relationships before any attempts at constructing explanatory models are made.

## Notes Chapter 2

1. The denominators used in computing all rates in this chapter are the national total population figures (or appropriate gender and/or age totals) for blacks in America in 1980 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983), unless otherwise specified.

2. Denominators for these rates are the total black population of the United States for each year from 1976-1987. These population figures were obtained from The Statistical Abstracts of the United States, which provides population estimates for the nation for each year (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988).

### CHAPTER 3

#### SPOUSE, PARENT, AND CHILD HOMICIDE VICTIMIZATION AMONG BLACK AMERICANS

This chapter presents data regarding patterns in three specific types of family homicide, namely, those occurring between spouses, parent to child, and child to parent homicides. These relationships not only compose the core of family relationships, but they account for the majority of family homicides as well. Examining specific relationship types of homicide which occur within the family is essential for understanding the meaning of the patterns of "family" homicide presented in Chapter 2.

The dynamics of relationships between different family members are quite different, and one may expect to find important differences as well in the ways in which homicide victimization occurs between various members of families. The distinctions include the fact that spouses are not blood kin, (while parents and children are), they are both adults who are involved in a peer relationship (also not the case in parent-child relationships). Power distribution is also quite different in the three categories of family relationships to be examined here. Does the picture of overall family homicide presented in Chapter change when examining patterns of murder within different family relationships?

As in the last chapter, which dealt with family, acquaintance, and stranger homicides, this chapter will present comparisons of the three

types of family homicide with regard to the same criterion variables used in chapter 2, i.e., race, age, gender, time, weapon, circumstance, and various combinations of all these variables.

### 3.1 Victimization of Black Spouses, Parents, and Children

Figure 3.1 shows homicide victimization rates<sup>1</sup> for blacks for the three types of family homicide. Spousal homicide is by far more prevalent among black Americans than either parent or child murders. The spousal homicide rate is about 7 times higher than that for parents, and about 4 times higher than that for child killings. The second most likely victims of family homicides among blacks are children killed by their parents, where the victimization rate is about 1 and a half times as great as that for parents killed by children.

The fact that more homicides occur between spouses than between parents and children is consistent with survey research on family violence. Those samples have revealed higher rates of life threatening behaviors such as threatening with or using guns or knives between spouses than by parents towards their children (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980; Straus and Gelles, 1986). Spouse relationships are the only category examined here which involve two adults who are peers. It may be that violence is more likely to escalate to a lethal context in such a situation than when norms of protection and respect are present, as in parent-child relationships. Parents and children are literally part of each other, and this special feature of their relationship (not found between spouses) may in part account for the relatively low rate of homicide in this group when compared with husbands and wives.

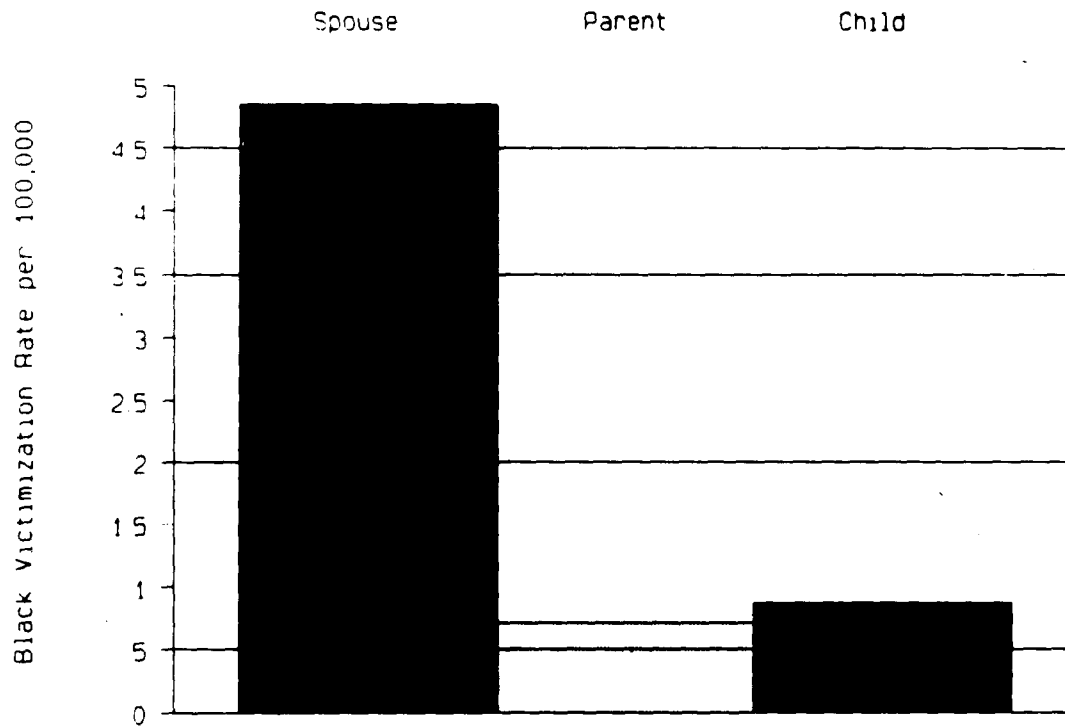


Fig. 3.1 Spouse, Parent, and Child Homicide Victimization

When homicide does occur between parents and their children, children are the more likely victims. This is most likely a reflection of the power differential inherent in these relationships, with parents most likely to take the dominant role even when children are grown. In addition, the period of time in which parents and children have the greatest amount of contact with one another (including co-residing) is when children are young and likely to be physically weaker than their adult parents.

It is interesting to note that Plass and Straus (1987), in examining similar patterns of homicide victimization between white spouses, parents, and children, found that white children experienced victimization rates almost identical to those for white parents. While it is quite possible that these patterns reflect "truth", in that for some reasons the lethal violence which occurs between white parents and children is more likely to be mutual than that between black parents and their children, there is also another possible explanation. Perhaps black children killed by their parents are more likely to be labeled as homicide victims than are white children. A great deal of research in the area of physical abuse of children has found that children from minority and low income families are more likely to be recognized and labeled by social service agencies as being physically abused by their parents than are white children (Gelles, 1982; Giovannoni and Becerra, 1979; Hampton and Newberger, 1985; Newberger et al., 1977; Straus and Smith, 1990; Turbett and O'Toole, 1980) Parental killings of children, especially very small children, are possibly the easiest type of family homicide to conceal. Presumably, at least some of the murders of very



young children, children who have limited contact with the outside world (through school, etc.) may be passed off as accidental. It is possible that many of these killings, especially of white children who are less likely to be labeled by social service networks as abused, are officially recorded as accidents, with the true lethal intent never coming to light. The fact that minority children are more likely than white children to be officially identified as abused by intervention agencies suggests that when lethal abuse occurs, minority children may also be more likely to be labelled as homicide victims (as opposed to victims of "accidents"). Thus, while it is almost certainly true that black children are killed by their parents at higher rates than are white children, the issue of social definition of violent incidents must also be taken into consideration here, and may account for the smaller difference in victimization rates for white parent-to-child and child-to-parent homicides.

In summary, then, the examination of spouse, parent, and child homicides by race reveal the following patterns:

- 1) Spousal homicides are much more common than are those which occur between parents and children.
- 2) In murders which involve parents and their children, children are more likely to be victims than are parents.

### 3.2 Patterns by Gender

The data on gender patterns of overall family homicide presented in Chapter 2 showed that black men were more likely to be killed in the family context than were black women, but that the ratio between male

and female victimization rates was smaller for family homicide than for the non-family relationship categories. Are there differences in rates of victimization when homicide in specific family relationships are examined? Are black men or women more (or less) likely to be killed in one family relationship setting than others? Are patterns of victimization by gender similar within the three family relationship categories? These are the types of questions which will be addressed here.

### 3.2A Spousal Homicide by Gender

The first two lines of Table 3.1 contains total spousal homicide victimization rates for black men and women, and victimization rates by the gender of perpetrator. Black men have somewhat higher victimization rates at the hands of spouses than do black women--the rate at which husbands are killed among blacks is about 27% higher than the rate at which wives are murdered. This corresponds to the pattern of overall family homicide discussed in Chapter 2, in which black men were more likely victims of homicide in the family context than were black women. However, this pattern is sharply different from that found by other researchers for spousal homicide in the white population. Plass and Straus (1987) found that for whites, women were considerably more likely to be killed by a spouse than were men. Why is it that among blacks the most likely victim of spousal homicide is a husband, while among whites wives are more likely to be killed? Although certainly no conclusions can be drawn from this descriptive data, it is possible to engage in some educated speculation as to what the meaning of this significant

Table 3.1 Black Spouse, Parent, and Child Homicide  
Victimization Rates (per 100K) by Gender of  
Victim and of Offender 1980-1984

Victim	Gender of Perpetrator		Total
	Male	Female	
Husband	---	5.70	5.70
Wife	4.50	----	4.50
Father	1.02	.18	1.20
Mother	.35	.06	.41
Son	.86	.59	1.45
Daughter	.23	.34	.57

---

divergence in the patterns of spousal homicide for whites and blacks might be.

A logical place to start in thinking about explanations for the quite disparate patterns as regards the involvement of blacks and whites in family homicide is with an examination of why women kill their husbands. There is much evidence which would seem to suggest that women kill their husbands after they have been abused by them, often for a period of many years (see, for example, Browne, 1987; Chimbos, 1978; Daniel and Harris, 1982; Totman, 1978; Walker, 1990). This explanation seems to hold equal weight for women of both races. The murder of a battering husband becomes, for many women, the only means of escape from an abusive relationship, especially in light of the fact that those men who are the most severe (and dangerous) batterers are also those who are least likely to 'allow' their wives to leave or divorce them. Thus, the women who kill their husbands may be seen as a subset of all battered wives, i.e., those who have either found no other means of escape from these relationships, or those who feel sufficiently threatened by the violence of their partners that they find an equally (or more) violent response is their only alternative. A key question, then, may be why might it be more difficult for black women to leave battering relationships than it is for white women? Or, alternatively, why might black women be more likely to "choose" homicide as a response to battering than are white women?

It is quite possible that economics play an important role in keeping women of either race from leaving a dangerous marriage. The family violence literature has often cited emotional dependency as a tie

which tends to hold battered women in violent marriages (Kalmuss and Straus, 1990; Walker, 1979). In addition, families who experience economic stress are at higher risk for the experience of violence as well (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980). Black women, on the average, have the lowest income of any of the four race/gender combinations examined here. Although much is made on the part of opponents of affirmative action programs of the ease of finding employment as a black woman (a member of two minority groups), the social truth still obviously remains that black women have less income than white men or women or than black men. The difficulty of making it without the support of two incomes may prove a definite deterrent to many black women in attempts to leave a violent relationship before it comes to the stage of lethal interaction.

A somewhat different argument vis-a-vis the importance of economics in effecting spousal homicide among blacks might also be made. If it is true, as suggested by Wolfgang (1958) and others (Boudouris, 1971; Staples, 1986) that black women kill their spouses in an act of self-preservation, then it is possible that the economic deprivation experienced by black men may also be a contributing factor in the occurrence of spousal homicide among blacks. Staples (1986) suggests that the widespread unemployment experienced by black men, and their subsequent inability to fulfill the "breadwinner" role as prescribed for husbands by American culture, may contribute to their high rates of victimization in spousal homicides. He writes of these victimization trends,

...it can also reflect the low status of black men in their family relations because of their inability to

find jobs or because they are employed at jobs which pay very low wages...In the higher social classes, both black and white, men are able to exercise control over their wives in other than violent ways...they possess greater resources with which to achieve their aims with intimates. The balance of power in marriage belongs to the partner bringing the most resources to the marriage. (Staples, 1986: pg. 145)

However, in considering the importance of economic restrictions in keeping black women in a battering relationship, it must also certainly be pointed out that a larger percentage of black than white women are heads of households (and subsequently do live without the income of a husband), in spite of the economic constraints under which black women live. Thus, an economic dependence argument may not be entirely sufficient in explaining why black women are less likely to leave battering relationships than are white women. An additional, and perhaps even stronger, argument may be made on the basis of the emotional dependency--Walker (1978) and others (Finkelhor, 1983; Martin, 1978; Walker, 1979) have cited the emotional dependency which battered women may feel towards their abusers (especially in light of the emotional battering which typically occurs in violent relationships). Battered women tend to suffer from low self-esteem--a common result of the self blame many victims of family violence experience (Finkelhor, 1983)--and may come to see themselves as lacking in worth or feeling that no one else would want them.

This dynamic is complicated for black women by what family sociologists refer to as a marriage pool disparity (Spanier and Glick, 1980). The age differential between men and women (with the number of women exceeding that of men) begins at an earlier age level for blacks

than it does for whites. The result is a marked shortage of potential marriage partners for black women, beginning in the early 20's, the period during which Americans are most likely to marry. This marriage pool disparity for black women is further complicated by the fact that other social factors remove even more of the available black men from the ranks of potential marital partners. Staples, for example (1985) suggests that higher percentages of black than white men are homosexual (see also Bell and Weinberg, 1978), are imprisoned or enlisted in the armed forces. Black men, particularly the most successful and well educated black men, are also more often involved in interracial marriages than are black women. The end result of this is that black women have much more limited options in the search for a marital partner than do white women.

This gender imbalance among blacks has been cited as a possible contributing factor in the earlier onset of sexual activity for black women than for whites. Spanier and Glick (1980) suggest that black women may become sexually active earlier because the establishment of a strong bond with a black man at an early age may be one way of assuring a marriage partner.

It is quite possible then, that given the relative shortage of black men, black women may feel more pressure to "hold onto" a mate once they have found one. Even a battering relationship may seem attractive in light of the limited options for conjugal unions. Thus, white women may be more likely to leave a battering relationship before violence escalates to the lethal stage than are black women. It is also important to consider reasons why the violence occurring in black

marriages more often turns lethal for black men than for black women. One relevant question here is why homicide may be more likely to be the only escape hatch for black women than it is for white women. There is evidence that community support systems and other homicide safeguards may be less available to black women than they are to white women. Use of the police to mediate domestic disputes is less common among blacks. Asbury (1987) suggests that black women are reluctant to call in the police, to have their husbands arrested and jailed, because of (correctly) perceived racial injustice in the criminal justice system. The unwillingness then of black women to make use of this perceived white-dominated system of social control, may increase the likelihood of the occurrence of homicide.

This lower level of access to (or ability to make use of) police protection can also be seen as fitting in with the "routine activities" literature on the incidence of criminal activities. Cohen and Felson (1979) suggest that criminal actions occur when three factors converge-- "an offender with...criminal intentions, a person...providing a suitable target for the offender, and absence of guardians capable of preventing violations" (Cohen and Felson, 1979: 590). Lack of police involvement in the lives and violent interactions of black spouses may constitute an "absence of guardians", thus increasing the likelihood of victimization for blacks.

Black women are also less likely to make use of grass-roots community organizations such as shelters for battered women than are white women. Asbury writes that black women tend to see the shelter movement as something run by and for white women. Browne and Williams



(1989) found that the presence of a battered women's shelter in a community, while having no effect on the rates at which women were victims of spousal homicide, did have a negative relationship upon the rate at which men are killed by their wives. The reluctance or inability of black women to use this resource, then, may be a contributing factor in the rate at which they kill their husbands.

The greater degree of reluctance or inability of black women than white to dissolve a battering marriage is not a fully sufficient explanation for the divergent patterns of spousal homicide for the two races, especially given the fact that in general, divorce is a more common occurrence in black families than in white ones (Cherlin, 1981). While it may be that this appearance of greater willingness and ability to divorce is common among black couples in general, while those in violent relationships are indeed less likely to dissolve relationships for all the reasons cited above, it is also possible, even probably, that there are other factors and alternative explanations. One of these may be found in the consideration of the perceived dangerousness of black men may also contribute to the rate at which they are killed by black women. Boudouris (1971) attributed his finding of higher rates of homicide offense among black wives to the greater risk of assault faced by black women at the hands of black men. It is possible that black men are so much more and so much more often violent in their marriages than are white men that black women are more likely to perceive the violence which occurs as life-threatening, and therefore are more willing or likely to respond with killing their husbands in self defense.

In summary, then, the major patterns of black spousal homicide by gender presented here are:

- 1) Black men are more likely to be victims of spousal homicide than are black women. This is in contradiction to the pattern of spousal homicide in the total and in the white populations, where wives are more likely to be killed by a spouse than husbands.

### 3.2B Parent Homicides by Gender

The second two lines of Table 3.1 provide total victimization rates for black mothers and fathers killed by their children, along with victimization rates by the gender of perpetrator. Rates of parent homicide for both genders are lower than are rates of spousal killing. Overall, black men are much more likely to be killed by their children than are black women. The victimization rate for black fathers is nearly three times as high as that for black mothers. Expressed in another way, 71% of all the black parents who were killed by children are fathers, with 29% of black parent victims being female.

The fact that black men are at so much greater risk of parental homicide compared to black women is not initially surprising. As stated before, men in general tend to be much more at risk for homicide victimization than do women, and it is not surprising to find that this pattern holds in murders which occur between parents and their children. The differences in victimization rates for black mothers and fathers become more striking, however, when the composition of black families is considered. A high percentage of black families are headed by women

(Cherlin, 1981; Staples, 1985). Thus, a great number of black children live in family situations in which their fathers do not co-reside with them. Presumably, then, mothers in such families spend much more time with their children than do fathers (thus automatically putting themselves at greater "risk" of homicide by virtue of the sheer amount of contact they have with their children), and one might expect the ratio between male and female parent victimization rates to be reduced by this factor. The fact that black men experience such higher rates of parental homicide as compared to black women becomes more interesting in this light.

This relatively higher victimization for black men as compared to black women shows some parallels to the patterns revealed among spousal homicides. Some of the same forces could be at work in explaining this phenomenon, namely the greater degree of violence perpetrated by black men. It is possible that some of the black fathers being killed are murdered by children who are in a sense responding to violence which they (or their mothers) have experienced at the hands of these men. This coupled with anger or frustration with father figures who have failed, due to unemployment, racism, and other similar social disabilities so common among black males in America, to live up to expected standards of "fatherhood" may also make them more likely candidates for homicide at the hands of their children. Likewise, the reputedly close relationship between black mothers and their children may make the choice of a father as a victim over a mother even more likely.

Turning to the gender of perpetrators, the table indicates that both black mothers and fathers are more likely to be killed by a male than a female child. The victimization rate for black fathers killed by a son is 5.67 times as great as the rate at which black men are killed by daughters. Likewise, victimization rates for black women killed by sons are almost six times as great as are their rates of victimization at the hands of daughters. Staples (1986) writes in explaining the levels of violence perpetrated against parents by black children, specifically sons,

The lack of status and economic resources among lower class black families means that many parents are unable to control a child's aggressive behavior toward them... Being a poor, uneducated young black male in an oppressive environment without any means of escape, and having observed violence throughout his childhood are explosive forces which erupt in aggression against those who are physically accessible, namely the parents (Staples, 1986: pg. 147).

Summarizing patterns of parent homicide victimization for black mothers and fathers we find

- 1) Fathers are more likely than mothers to be killed by their children. Nearly three quarters of all black parents murdered by children are fathers.
- 2) Sons are more likely than daughters to be perpetrators in killings of both mothers and of fathers.

### 3.2C Child Homicides by Gender

The last two lines of Table 3.1 contains total and perpetrator gender specific victimization rates for black children killed by a parent. Sons are much more likely to be killed by their parents than

are daughters, with the victimization rate for black males murdered by a parent being almost three times that for black females. Put another way, 68% of all black children killed by a parent are sons, with 32% of the victims being daughters.

The fact that black sons are so much more likely to be killed than are black daughters may be a reflection of the greater degree of violence perpetrated by black males. They may well be seen as more of a threat, especially as they reach adolescence or beyond, and actually be more of a threat to their parents. Lacking other resources for controlling their children, black parents may be more likely to use violence--even ultimately lethal violence--to control the behavior of their more aggressive sons.

"Controlling" children is quite important from the perspective of many black families. Given the many dangers which face black children, especially black males, the ability to discipline children may well be seen as a matter of life or death itself. Given the high rates of drug abuse, imprisonment, gang membership, assault, homicides, and other dangerous life experiences which threaten black children (especially black men) black parents may feel compelled to use sometimes extreme measures in attempts to keep their children out of trouble. This desperation to "discipline" or control children may sometimes result in lethal events. Lassiter (1987) suggests that history itself plays a role in contributing to what she calls "child-abusing discipline". The difficulties of dealing with life under slavery and later in a racist white society have made for a system of harsh child rearing practices among blacks. Parents feel that they must be tough with their children

at home if these children are to be enabled to survive the harsh white world. Thus, the racism of the larger society and the historical and present-day discrimination experienced by blacks in American society can in itself be seen as a factor in increasing the rate of homicide perpetrated against black children (especially males) by their parents.

Turning to the gender of perpetrators, one can see that while black sons are most likely to be killed by their fathers (with victimization rates almost one and a half times as high as those for mother perpetrated homicides), black women are somewhat more likely to be killed by their mothers. Put another way, about 60% of all black women killed by a parent are killed by a mother, while 35% of all black men killed by a parent are victimized by their mothers.

The fact that black women are more likely to be killed by their mothers than they are by their fathers may indicate something about the nature of interaction between black daughters and their parents. Perhaps fathers are less likely to interfere in the discipline and rearing of their daughters, leaving this task, and the accompanying frustrations and potentially emerging aggressions which go along with it, to mothers.

In summary, patterns of homicide victimization for black children killed by a parent reveal the following:

- 1) Sons are more likely to be murdered by their parents than are daughters. Sixty-eight percent of all black children killed by parents are boys.
- 2) Fathers are the most likely perpetrators in

killings of black children in general. They are also most likely to be offenders in murders of male children. However, black female children are more likely to be killed by mothers than by fathers.

### 3.3 Patterns by Age and Gender

In Chapter 2, data regarding overall family patterns of homicide victimization by race, age, and gender showed that both black men and women have homicide victimization patterns which peak in the 20's or 30's, and then begin a steady decline in older age groups. In addition, we found that the higher rate of victimization for black men than for black women in family homicides was not a function of age, as this pattern held for all age groups. Does victimization for the three family relationship categories for black men and women vary across age groups? Are patterns of gender involvement as victims of spousal, parent, and child homicide effected by age? These are the types of questions which will be addressed in this section.

#### 3.3A Spousal Homicide by Age and Gender

The first panel of Table 3.2 provide average yearly homicide victimization rates by age and gender for black spouses. The highest victimization rates for both genders occur in the 30-39 year old age bracket, with both sexes having their lowest rates of victimization in the youngest age group (15-19). After this peak in the 30's, both black men and women experience a fairly steady decrease in their rates of spousal homicide victimization in older age groups. This corresponds with research in the non-lethal family violence field, which has found that violence between married people in the general population tends to

Table 3.2 Black Spouse, Parent, and Child Homicide  
Victimization Rates (per 100K) by Gender  
and Age 1980-1984

Age of Victim	Male	Female
<b>A. Spouse</b>		
15-19	.11	.50
20-29	4.87	5.73
30-39	10.19	8.06
40-49	8.79	3.28
50-59	6.31	2.26
60+	3.14	1.27
<b>B. Parent</b>		
15-19	.00	.00
20-29	.08	.00
30-39	.62	.13
40-49	2.22	.48
50-59	2.99	.90
60+	2.34	.79
<b>C. Child</b>		
0-4	6.74	4.54
5-9	.76	.37
10-14	.34	.27
15-19	.87	.05
20+	.64	.12



decrease with age (Gelles, 1974; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980; Sutor, Pillemer, and Straus, 1990).

In considering victims of spousal homicide under the age of 30, black women are more at risk than are black men. The rate at which black wives aged 15-19 are killed is 4.5 times higher than that for black husbands in the same age group, and black women in their 20's are murdered at a rate that is 1.2 times that of the victimization rate for black men in this age group. For those victims aged 30 or over, however, this trend is reversed, with black men in all of these age groups having higher rates of victimization than do black women. The disparity between victimization rates for the genders does, in fact, increase fairly steadily as the age of the victim increases. Thus, the victimization rate of black men in their 30's is 1.26 times that of black women of the same age, in their 40's 2.68 times, 2.79 times among 50 year olds, and black men aged 60 and over are 2.47 times as likely to be killed by a spouse as are black women. It is most interesting that before age 30, victimization patterns for blacks more closely resemble those discussed elsewhere in the literature for whites, in that women are the more likely victims than men in spousal homicide. The fact that it is only among blacks age 30 or older that this trend reverses is an important finding. Of the possible explanations for this phenomenon presented above, the age patterns provided here supports the idea that there is some effect of the "marriage pool disparity". As the population ages, the ratio between black men and women in the population grows wider and wider. It is possible that this "shortage" of black men in older age groups (even more marked, given the fact that many of the

men who are in older age groups will be marrying younger women) makes black women more likely to stay in a battering relationship, and more likely to find lethal violence the only way out.

In summary, then, the data on spousal homicide among blacks by age and gender reveal the following patterns:

- 1) Both black men and black women have their peak rates of victimization in spousal homicide in the 30-39 year old age group. Lowest victimization rates for both genders occur in the 15-19 year old age group.
- 2) Among blacks under age 30, women have higher victimization rates than do men in spousal homicide. In age groups over 30, this pattern reverses, and men are more likely to be killed by a spouse than are women.

### 3.3B Parent Homicide by Age and Gender

The second panel of Table 3.2 provides victimization rates by age and gender for black parents killed by their children. Both black men and black women have highest victimization rates for parent homicide in the 50-59 year old age group. The pattern of victimization by age is similar for both genders, in that there is a steady rise to a peak rate in the 50's, and then a slight drop in the rate of homicide victimization for the 60 and older age group.

The fact that both black men and women experience their highest homicide rates in their 50's is probably related to the age at which children are most likely to be physically able to commit homicide.

Parents in their 50's can be expected to have children who are themselves adults (perhaps in their 20's or 30's). Such adult children are more likely to have the weapons or the physical resources to commit homicide (it is physically much more difficult, for example, for young children to kill their adult, and much larger, parents), and are less likely to be physically or emotionally dependent on their parents than are younger children.

The picture of parent homicide among blacks which emerges, then, is one in which older parents are more likely to be killed than younger ones. While this finding lends support to the concern over the physically abusive victimization of elderly parents by their children (see, for example, Cornell and Gelles, 1982; Pillemer, 1985), a comparison of these homicide rates with those for spouses adds an important element. While homicide victimization rates are higher for elderly black parents than they are for younger ones, the victimization rates for older blacks (age 50 and up) killed by their spouses are still higher than those for parent homicides. This pattern of lethal violence supports some survey research on abuse of the elderly which has found that members of the elderly population who suffer from family violence are at higher risk for abuse by spouses than by children (Pillemer and Finkelhor, 1988; Finkelhor and Pillemer, 1988).

Black men of every age bracket have much higher homicide victimization rates than do their female counterparts. However, the ratio between black male and female victimization rates steadily decreases as age increases, that is, the greatest disparity in

victimization rates for men and women occurs in the 30-39 year old age group, and the smallest in the 60 and older group.

In summary, then, the patterns of homicide victimization for black parents revealed here reveal the following:

- 1) Black parents of both genders experience a gradual rise in homicide victimization rates, with a peak for both men and women coming in the 50-59 year old age group. Rates of victimization for both genders drop slightly in the 60 and older group.
- 2) Homicide victimization rates among older black parents (age 50 and up) are lower than are rates of killing among spouses in the same age groups.

### 3.3C Child Homicide by Age and Gender

The bottom panel of Table 3.2 provide average yearly homicide victimization rates by age and gender for black children killed by their parents. The highest victimization rates for both male and female black children occur in the youngest age group, i.e., 0-4, with the murder rate for boys being about 1 1/2 times that for girls of this age. Victimization rates for both genders decrease dramatically in the older age groups. The second highest male victimization rate--that for 15-19 year olds--is 7.7 times smaller than that for 0-4 year olds. The second highest female victimization rate--in the 5-9 year old age group--is more than 12 times less than the rate for 0-4 year olds.

Victimization rates for males are higher than those for females for all age groups. This corresponds to findings regarding the occurrence

of non-lethal physical abuse among children, where boys are generally found to be more at risk than are girls (American Humane Association, 1986; Bryan and Freed, 1982; Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz, 1980). However, there is also evidence in studies of physical abuse of children which suggests that among older children (i.e., teenagers), girls are more likely to be abused than are boys (see Wauchope and Straus, 1990, for an exception to this). This pattern is not supported by the homicide rates presented here. Boys in the 0-4 age group have victimization rates 1.48 times as great as that of girls in the same age, the rate of victimization among 5-9 year old black boys is about 2 times that of girls, among 10-14 year olds boys are 1.26 times as likely to be killed by a parent, 17.4 times as likely to be victimized in the 15-19 year old category, and black males over age 20 are more than 5 times as likely to be murdered by a parent as are black females in this age group.

Wauchope and Straus (1990) suggest that the higher rate of abuse so often found among teenage girls may in part be explained by the fact that "parents may be less likely to fear physical retaliation by girls" (p. 135). In the area of homicide victimization among black children killed by their parents, the dynamic may be, as suggested above, that parents are more likely to be assaulted by older male children, and to see these children as a threat, than is the case with older females.

Examining the percentage breakdowns of black male and female children killed by a parent adds more to the total picture. A much larger percentage of the total black daughters killed are in the 0-4 age group--that is, while about 3/4 of all the black females killed by their

parents are in this age group, only about 1/2 of all the black male victims of parental homicide are in the 0-4 year old age category. The other major segment of homicides for children of both genders occurs in the 20 and older age bracket. Here, however, a much larger percentage of black males (30%) than females (14%) killed by their parents are in this oldest age group.

In summary, then, the patterns of black child homicide by age and gender show:

1) Black males in every age group are more likely to be killed by a parent than are females.

2) Peak rates of victimization in child homicide for both males and females are found among 0-4 year olds. A somewhat higher percentage of all female victims than of all male victims of child homicide are in this age group. About three quarters of all black females killed by a parent are 0-4, while about half of all males are in this age group.

#### 3.4 Time Trends 1976-1987

In Chapter 2 we found that family homicide has decreased in the 1976-1987 period; the difference between peak and low family homicide rates during this time was, in fact, greater than that for either of the non-family murder rates. Is this pattern of decrease over time more marked in one family relationship type of homicide than in others? Are the time patterns of spouse, parent, and child homicide similar? These are the types of questions which will be addressed here.

Figure 3.2 shows time trend data from 1976 to 1987 for black spousal homicide victimization rates, while Figures 3.3 and 3.4 contain similar data for parent and child homicides respectively. Spousal homicides are by far the most common type of family homicides for blacks in all twelve years. The lowest spousal homicide rate in the period is higher than the highest rates of either parent or child killings, and the peak spousal homicide rate is more than seven times as high as the peak rates for either parent or child murders. Among parent-child and child-parent homicides, children seem to be somewhat more at risk to be killed by their parents than are parents to be killed by their children. The victimization rate is higher for children for nine of the twelve years reported here, with the parent and child homicide rates being identical for one additional year.

Spousal homicides peak in 1976 (7.51), those for parents in 1979 (1.00), with child homicides reaching their high point in 1978 (1.06). The lowest spousal homicide rate occurs in 1987 (3.26) as does that for parent murders (.48). The low point for child homicides occurs somewhat earlier, in 1985 (.79). The higher incidence of child than parent homicide seems to be a result of a more marked drop in parent homicides. The peak homicide rates for these two relationships are quite similar, with the marked difference being a result of a more significant decline in parent than in child murders.

Table 3.3 shows the range of homicide victimization for the three types of family murders, along with the percentage of change between peak and low points in the twelve year period of data. Spousal homicides show the greatest degree of variation, with a 130% rate of

Black Spousal Homicide Victimization  
Rate per 100,000

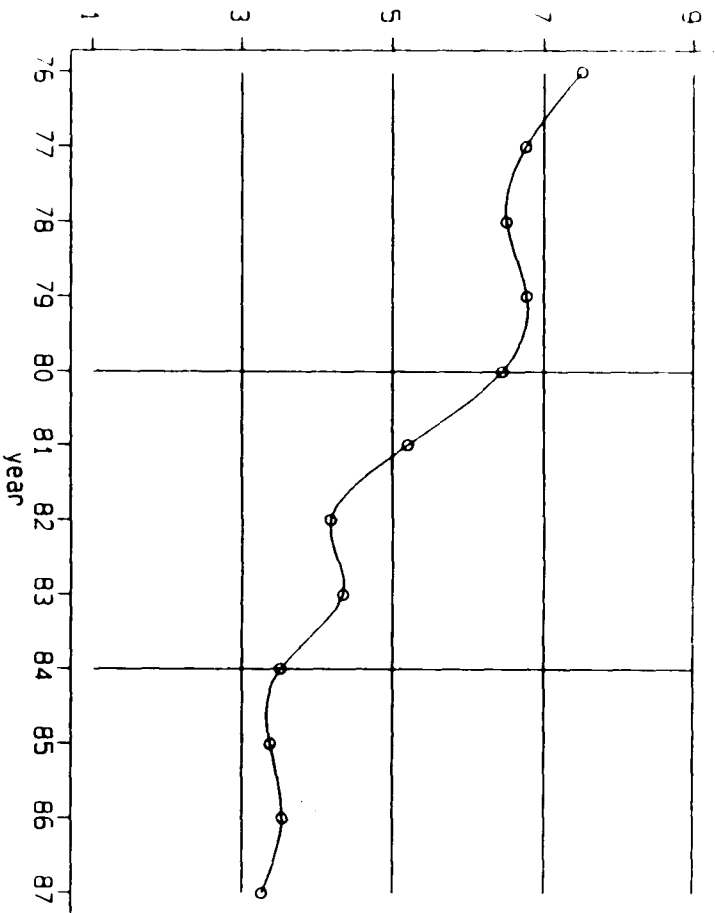


Fig 3.2 Spousal Homicide Victimization 1976-1987



Black Parent Homicide Victimization  
Rate per 100,000

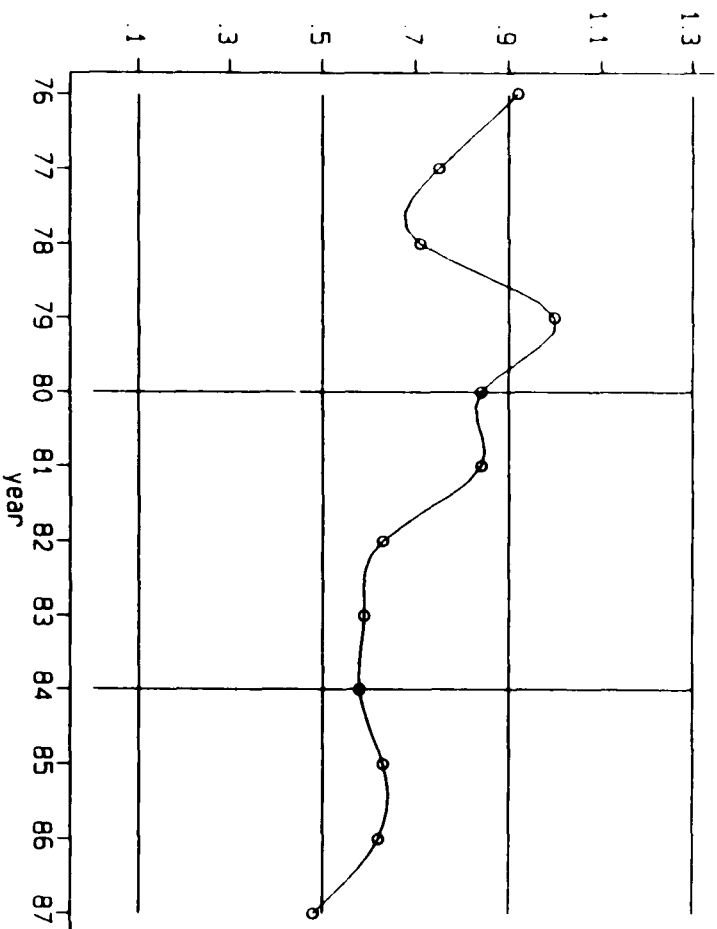


Fig. 3.3 Parent Homicide Victimization 1976-1987

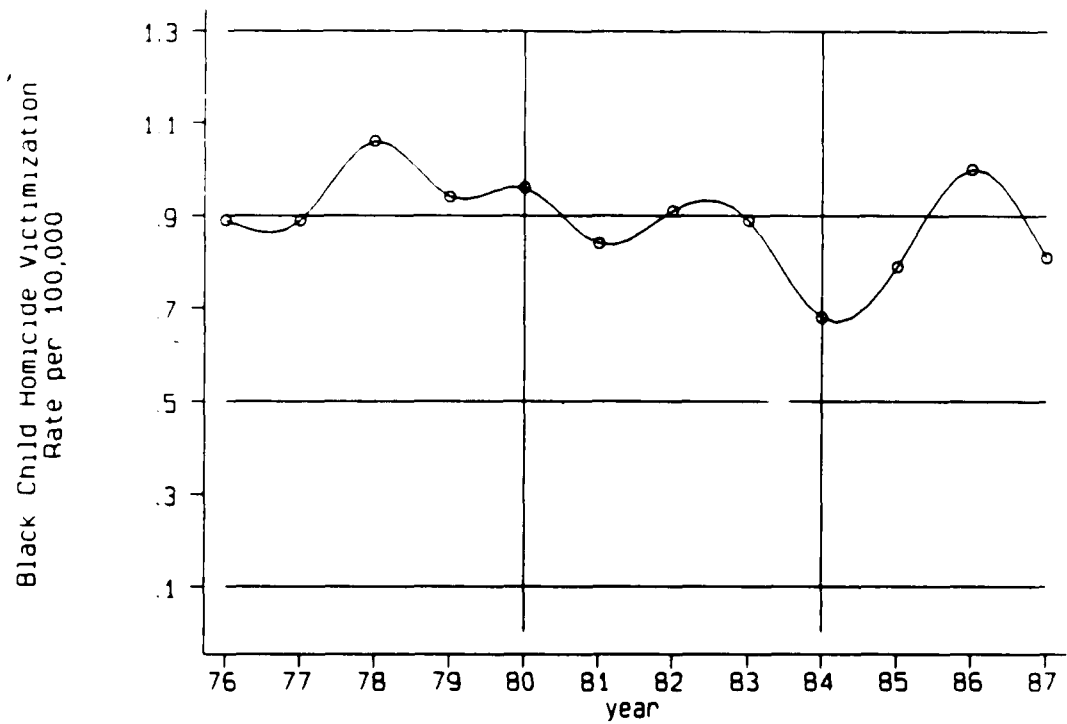


Fig. 3.4 Child Homicide Victimization 1976-1987

Table 3.3 Peak and Low Victimization Rates (per 100K) for  
 Black Spouse, Parent, and Child Homicides  
 1976-1984

Homicide Type	Peak Rate (year)	Low Rate (year)	% Change
Spouse	7.51 (1976)	3.26 (1987)	130%
Parent	1.00 (1979)	.48 (1987)	108%
Child	1.06 (1978)	.68 (1984)	56%

difference in the victimization rate for the peak year (1976) and the lowest year (1987). Parent homicides also experience a large degree of change in the period, showing a 108% difference between the highest year of 1979 and the low point in 1987. The victimization rate for child homicides is much more static, showing only a 56% rate of change in peak and low points throughout the twelve years of data.

The decline in spouse, parent, and child homicide for blacks during the twelve year period is certainly a hopeful trend, and one which corresponds to patterns of overall family homicide in this time. In Chapter 2, we found that the range of change in peak and low homicide points was greater for black family homicide than for any other type of murder. This finding is even more striking in this examination of spousal, parent, and child homicides. The large declines in rates of spouse and parent homicide among blacks presents a further challenge to the primary group lag thesis (that is, that the rate of homicides occurring among family members tends to be less fluctuating than other victim/offender relationship types of homicides--see further discussion in Chapter 2). The much smaller rate of change in child homicides throughout the period suggests that this type of homicide may be less effected by factors outside of the family than are the other types of family murder examined here.

In summary, then, the comparison of time trends for black spouse, parent, and child victimization in the period of 1976-1987 seems to suggest the following:

- 1) Victimization rates for black spouse, parent, and child homicides all experienced some measure of

decline during the 1976-1987 period.

- 2) The percentage difference between peak and low homicide rates in the period were most marked in spousal homicide (with a 130% difference) and least significant among child killings (56%). Parent homicides showed a 108% difference between peak low homicide rates in the twelve year period.

### 3.5 Patterns of Weapon Usage

The weapons discussed in this section are divided in four categories: (1) guns (includes unspecified firearms, handguns, rifles, shotguns, and "other" guns) (2) knives and cutting instruments, (3) objects/personal weapons (personal weapons imply the use of hands, feet, etc.) and (4) "other" weapons (poison, defenestration, explosives, fire, narcotics, drowning, strangulation, asphyxiation). The kind of weapon used in a homicide event can suggest a number of things about the nature of the event itself. The use of a gun, for example, may imply that the victim was more physically powerful than the offender (as guns, as very deadly weapons, tend to minimize differences in physical strength), that the victim was possibly some physical distance away from the perpetrator (as guns are accurate from a distance, unlike most of the other weapons examined here), and that the perpetrator was more likely to have intended the death of his/her victim, as opposed to injury only. The use of a gun as a homicide weapon also, obviously, requires the possession of such a weapon. The other weapons examined here are more likely to be commonly available to everyone, without having to make any

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special (and lethally intended) effort at obtaining them (nearly every household, for example has knives and "objects"). While the mere possession of a gun does not necessarily make its use for deadly purposes more likely (see Kleck (1979) and Turner (1977) for opposing views on this issue), the availability of a gun obviously should be seen as making the outcome of an assaultive event more likely to be homicide as opposed to injury.

The use of objects/personal weapons, conversely, implies that the victim was physically weaker than the offender, that the offender was in close physical proximity to the victim when the homicide was perpetrated, and, possibly, that the original intent of the offender with regard to the victim was not murder. Especially in the consideration of family homicides, the use of objects or personal weapons may imply a murder which resulted from a beating which went too far. It will be important to keep such distinctions in mind in examining the patterns of weapon usage in family homicides examined in this section.

Evaluation of the data on patterns of overall family homicide in Chapter 2 showed that the majority of black homicide victims killed by family members were murdered with some type of gun. Does this pattern change when specific family relationship homicides are examined? Do patterns of weapon usage vary across the three family relationship types of homicide? Are victims of spouse, parent and child homicide likely to be killed with the same types of weapons? These are the types of questions which will be addressed in this section.

### 3.5A Spousal Homicides by Weapon Used

The first two columns of Table 3.4 show that both black men and women who are victims of spousal homicide are most likely to be murdered by a gun. Black men have higher victimization rates than black women when the weapon considered is either a gun or a knife/cutting instrument (1.2 times that of women for guns and almost 3 times as high for knives). For those black spouses killed by objects/personal weapons or by "other" category weapons, women have higher victimization rates than do men (4.7 times the victimization rate of men for objects/personal weapons and 2.5 times for "other" weapons).

An examination of percentage breakdowns by weapon used further clarifies the picture of black spousal homicide. The majority of all spousal homicides for black men and women are perpetrated with firearms (62% of the husbands and 68% of the wives). A larger percentage of men than women are killed by knives (35% of all husbands and 16% of all wives), while women are more likely to be killed by objects/personal weapons (2% of husbands, 11% of wives) or "other" weapons (1% of husbands, 5% of wives).

The victimization rates for black women killed by objects/personal weapons or by "other" weapons are actually higher than those for black men (while in general, as stated above, black men are more likely victims of spousal homicide than are black women). It is only when a more traditional weapon (i.e., guns or knives) is involved that black men have higher victimization rates in spousal homicide. The use of a weapon like a gun or knife tends to even out differentials in physical

Table 3.4 Black Spouse, Parent, and Child Homicide  
Victimization Rates (per 100K) by Gender  
and Type of Weapon Used 1980-1984

Type Weapon	Spouse		Parent		Child	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Guns	3.43	2.87	.58	.15	.46	.07
Knife	1.97	.70	.38	.12	.11	.05
Object/ Personal	.10	.47	.13	.05	.47	.26
Other	.08	.20	.01	.05	.21	.16



strength. This lends some support to the notion that black women kill their husbands in response to violence being perpetrated upon them, using a powerful weapon to "even the scales" in such encounters.

The fact that guns are the most commonly used weapon in spousal homicide for both races and genders is not surprising. The vast majority of American homicides in general are perpetrated with firearms (Block, 1976; O'Carrol and Mercy, 1986; Rose and Deskins, 1986; Rushforth, et al., 1977; Zimring, 1979), and it is not unexpected to find this same trend holding in patterns of family homicide. There are a number of reasons why so many homicides are committed using guns. First of all, there is the relatively large number of assaults perpetrated with guns and a large number of guns which are in the possession of private citizens in the United States. In addition, however, guns are quite reliable as murder weapons, that is, a gunshot wound is more likely to be fatal than are other wounds.

It is interesting that a relatively larger percentage of wife than of husband victims are killed by objects/personal weapons. The (by definitions) male perpetrators of wife homicides are more likely to be more physically powerful than their victims, and thus more "successful" at killing their wives through use of their own strength than wives are at killing their husbands through this means. This also gives some support to the notion that a greater number of wives than husbands who are murdered are killed as the result of a battering incident which has gone too far.

In summary, then, the patterns of spousal homicide victimization among black men and women by weapon used reveal the following:

- 1) Black spouses of both genders are more likely to killed by a gun than by any other type of weapon.
- 2) Black men have higher rates of victimization in spousal homicide than do black women in murders committed by guns or by knives/cutting instruments. Black wives have higher rates of victimization than do black husbands in murders perpetrated with "objects/personal weapons" or "other weapons"

### 3.5B Parent Homicides by Weapon Used

The second two columns of Table 3.4 provide victimization rates for black mothers and fathers by the weapon used in the homicide event. Both men and women are most likely to be killed by some type of gun, with the second most likely weapon being a knife or cutting instrument, followed by objects/personal weapons, and "other" weapons.

Even though both spousal and parent homicides are most likely to be perpetrated with firearms, there is a somewhat less marked tendency among parent homicides than among spousal killings for the victim to be killed with a gun, i.e., a greater percentage of all spousal than parent homicide victims are killed by guns. A number of conclusions might be drawn from this pattern. If guns are seen as the most reliable weapon, and the one which most effectively evens out differences in physical power between victim and offender, it is perhaps surprising that more parents than spouses are not killed by guns. However, as noted above, as the majority of parent homicide victims are in their 50's, it is probably not incorrect to assume that the children who kill these

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parents are of an age at which they are at least as physically powerful as their parents, and perhaps even more so. In addition, it is possible that there is a relative reluctance on the part of children who kill their parents, as opposed to spouses who kill their partners, to use a weapon as deadly and clearly lethal as a gun. Perhaps a smaller percentage of parent than spousal murders are perpetrated with guns because the prohibitions against killing one's parent are greater than against killing a spouse (and, the use of a gun may imply that the offender more definitely intended homicide to be the result of his/her assault).

Men have higher victimization rates than women for every type of weapon, except in the "other" weapon category, where mothers have rates of victimization 5 times that of fathers. An examination of percentage breakdowns of the weapons used for parent homicides further refines the picture of parental homicide for black men and women. A little over half of black fathers murdered by their children are killed by guns (52%), as compared to 40% of the mothers murdered with these weapons. Knives were the murder weapon in 35% of father killings and in 32% of those in which mothers were the victims. Twelve percent of fathers and 15% of mothers are killed by objects/personal weapons. Finally, 13% of the women killed by children were murdered with a weapon from the "other" category, as compared to only 1% of the men. Thus, children who kill their black fathers are slightly more likely to use guns than are those who kill their black mothers; also, black mothers are more likely than fathers to be killed by "other" weapons.

In summary, the patterns of weapon usage in homicides of black parents are as follows:

- 1) Black parents of both genders are more likely to be killed by a gun than by any other weapon.
- 2) A greater percentage of all spousal than parent homicides are perpetrated with guns.
- 3) Men have higher victimization rates than do women in every weapon category except for that of "other" weapons.

#### 3.5C Child Homicide by Weapon Used

The last two columns of Table 3.4 show that the highest rate of victimization for both males and females is found in homicides which were perpetrated with objects/personal weapons (although for males, this rate is nearly identical to the rate for gun homicides). After objects/personal weapons, victimization rates for males are highest for guns, followed by "other" weapons, and knives. For females, the second highest victimization rates are found in homicides perpetrated by "other weapons", followed by guns, and knives. Victimization rates for boys are higher than those for girls in every weapon category.

The majority of black child homicides are perpetrated with a weapon other than a firearm. Only 12% of all the black females killed by a parent were killed by a gun, as compared with 37% of the black males murdered in this way. Objects/personal weapons were used in 48% of the female murders and in 37% of the males. Thus, the use of a gun among blacks in killing children seems to be much less common than in killings involving other family members.

It is not surprising that such a large percentage of children murdered by a parent are killed by use of objects/personal weapons. Parents are generally much more physically powerful than are their children, and the use of very intimate weapons (such as objects, hands, feet, etc.) are quite likely to result in death in such a situation. The fact that so many children are killed in this manner suggests that many of these victims may have been involved in a "routine" beating which went too far.

The fact that guns are less commonly used in homicides of children than in those involving other family members may also be a result of the power differential between children and parents. As established above, a large majority of the children killed by their parents are under age 4, and for such a small child the use of a gun may seem like "overkill". It is also unlikely that such a child would seem threatening to an adult parent at all, or that a parent would feel the need to use such a destructive (and physically distancing) weapon in responding to the actions of a child.

In summary, then, the patterns of child homicide among blacks by weapons are:

- 1) Black children of both genders are most likely to be killed by objects/personal weapons. Among males, the rate of victimization by guns is nearly equal to that for personal weapons. Female children are more likely to be killed by "other" weapons than they are by guns.

- 2) The victimization rates for black male children are higher than those for black female children in every category of weapon.

### 3.6 Patterns by Precipitating Circumstance

In the discussion of overall black family homicide victimization patterns by circumstance in Chapter 2, we found that the majority of homicide victims killed by family members were murdered in the context of an argument. Is this pattern consistent when specific family relationship homicides are examined? Do the circumstances under which black spouses, parents, and children are murdered vary? These are the types of questions which will be addressed in this section.

#### 3.6A Spousal Homicide by Circumstance

The first column of Table 3.5 shows that the vast majority of spousal killings (72%) occur in the context of conflicts/arguments. The rate of victimization for spouses killed in this circumstance is more than five times as great as the next highest circumstance victimization rate--that for "other non-felony". Almost no black spouses (1.4%) were killed in the "index crime/other felony" circumstance (i.e., during the commission of another felony).

The picture which emerges of spousal homicide among blacks is one in which the majority of killings take place in the context of an argument. Given the nature of spousal relationships, this is not surprising. In intimate relationships, emotions often run high. Evidently, it is in the context of arguments between spouses that homicides are most likely to occur.

### 3.6B Parent Homicide by Circumstance

The second column of Table 3.5 provides homicide victimization rates for black parents killed by their children according to the circumstance under which the event occurred. As was the case in spousal homicide, black parents are most likely to be killed by their children in the context of an argument or conflict, although the percentage of all parent homicides perpetrated under these circumstances (61%) is somewhat smaller than was the case in spousal killings (72%). The victimization rate for parents killed in this circumstance is almost four times higher than the next highest circumstance rates--"other non-felony" and "unknown".

As was the case with spousal homicide, very few black parents are killed by children during the commission of another felony. However, the percentage of all parents killed in other felony circumstances (4.3%) is somewhat higher than that for spouses (1.4%).

Like spouses, parent homicides are most likely to occur in the context of an argument or other conflict with their children. Once again, the intensity of the relationship between parents and children makes this a logical circumstance under which homicides occur.

### 3.6C Child Homicide by Circumstance

The third column of Table 3.5 contains homicide victimization rates for black children killed by a parent by the circumstance under which the homicide event occurred. The majority of black children killed were murdered in the context of "other non-felony" circumstance. Fifty-one percent of all child murders occur in this category of circumstance. Another 25% of children are murdered in the context of argument/conflict

Table 3.5 Black Spouse, Parent, and Child Homicide  
Victimization Rates (per 100K) by  
Circumstance of Event 1980-1984

Type of Circumstance	Type of Homicide		
	Spouse	Parent	Child
Index crime	.07	.03	.08
Vice/other crime	.00	.00	.00
Other non-felony	.66	.11	.46
Conflict/Argument	3.52	.43	.23
Unknown	.60	.13	.13



situations (with this category having the second highest rate of victimization). As is the case for parent and spouse homicides, very few children are killed by parents in the course of the commission of another felony (about 9%).

It is interesting that child homicide is the only category of family murder examined here which does not occur predominantly in the context of arguments/conflicts. Most likely, this is a reflection of the nature of the relationship between children and their parents. As stated above, the majority of victims of black child homicide are in the 0-4 age group. It is unlikely that such small children would be killed in the context of an "argument". The "other non-felony" category, in which the majority of these cases fall, is something of a catch-all from the perspective of FBI coding. Homicides which occur in this category are placed there simply because the circumstances under which they occurred do not fit any of the other available codes which the FBI uses. It would seem logical that a great number of the murdered black children in this circumstance category were killed in the context of some sort of abusive event.

In summary, then, the patterns of spouse, parent, and child homicide by precipitating circumstance reveal the following:

- 1) Spouses and parents are most likely to be murdered in the context of arguments/conflicts. Over half of the murders in each of these relationship categories occurred in this context.
- 2) Homicides of black children are most likely to fall in the "other felony" circumstance category.

Slightly over half of all child homicides occur in this circumstance.

- 3) Very few black spouse, parent, or child homicides occur during the commission of another felony.

The next section of this dissertation will focus on a multivariate analysis of homicide for blacks. The descriptive data provided in these last two chapters indicates that there may be some important ways in which homicides within the family among blacks are different from those which occur outside of the family. The multivariate analysis in the next section is intended to further examine what these differences might be.

The focus in the discussion of the demographic patterns in the last two chapters has largely been on how the factors of life for black individuals might lead them to kill or be killed by family members. The next chapters will deal with a somewhat different aspect of this analysis of black family homicide, namely an examination of structural forces which may effect the ways in which rates of family and non-family homicide vary from one location to another.

The difference here is a subtle one, as many of the "individual level" explanations put forth in these last two chapters (e.g., people murder their partners because of inequality in marriages--male female inequality) have obvious aggregate level counterparts (e.g., the level of inequality between men and women in a given city in terms of income, education, and the like). While the following multivariate analysis will be informed by the descriptive level information in the last two

chapters, and while a number of these "aggregate level counterparts" will be included in the model, this multivariate analysis will still have a different focus. If these descriptive chapters have sought to answer questions as to why a specific pattern of family homicide exists among black Americans, the following multivariate section can be said to focus on what structural factors in an aggregate level community may account for variations in the rate at which blacks kill members of their families and how factors which might be expected to be associated with why an individual might kill or be killed by a family member perform in explaining why one community might experience overall higher or lower rates of family homicide. These two perspectives, while clearly related, provide two different ways of looking at and examining the problem of homicide in black families. The "change in focus" in the multivariate section to follow will both enrich and clarify the meaning of the descriptive information provided here.

Notes Chapter 3

1. The denominators used in computing the spousal and parent homicide rates are the race and gender appropriate total population age 16 and over. While the appropriate denominators for all the rates presented in this chapter would of course be the number of spouses (and ex-spouses and common-law spouses) or parents, or children of parents (as these are the individuals "at risk" for these types of homicide), such counts are impossible to obtain. Using the population over age 16 for the spousal and parent homicide rates is intended to address the issue that all members of the population are not at risk for these types of homicide. This is not to suggest that all people over age 16 can be expected to be married or to be parents. However, it is a realistic, and conservative, way in which to control for the problem of who is "at risk" for a given type of murder within the family. The total age population is used in computing rates of child homicide, as everyone has parents, and thus is at least theoretically at risk for this type of homicide.

## CHAPTER 4

### BLACK HOMICIDE AND ITS CORRELATES IN 86 CITIES

Informed by the examination of demographic variations in patterns of homicide victimization for blacks killed by family members, it is now appropriate to turn to the construction of structural models. This chapter and the next will report results of a multivariate analysis aimed at identifying structural factors which explain variations in family, as compared with non-family, homicide rates in a sample of 86 American cities. What are the socio-structural variables which are associated with higher (or lower) rates of family and non-family homicides for blacks? Are the variables which predict variation in family murders different from those which predict non-family murders?

This chapter will report bi-variate correlations between a number of independent variables and black homicides which occur within and outside of the family relationship context. What variables are identified elsewhere in the homicide and family violence literature as possibly contributing to variations in homicide or in family violence, either for blacks or for the general population? Which independent variables are most highly correlated with the two relationship types of homicide? Are the same variables similarly related to homicide among blacks in both relationship contexts? These are the types of questions which will be

examined in this chapter. We will begin, however, with a discussion of the units of analysis employed here.

#### 4.1 Units of Analysis

An examination of the literature on homicide in America reveals numerous different strategies as regards the selection of appropriate units of analysis for multivariate equations. For example, Gastil, (1971), Hackney (1969), and Loftin and Hill (1974) all use state level analysis in examining homicide. State level research allows the investigator to include all of the homicides which occur in a given time period (rather than choosing a subset of those events, i.e., those which take place in a given part of each state such as cities). Criticism of state level analysis has focused on the fact that states, as units, are often quite diverse, lack homogeneity in terms of important causal variables, and are separated by "artificial" rather than social borders. For example, Messner (1983) is critical of such state level analysis, suggesting that these units of analysis--i.e., states-- "(do) not represent social entities in any meaningful sense" (Messner, 1983:999). Alternatively, many homicide researchers have used SMSA's or cities as units for analysis, with the idea being that such groups are likely to be more homogenous in terms of characteristics (such as poverty, population density, and the like) which may be contributing factors to variations in homicide rates, and are more likely to have "real" borders, i.e., ones which are socially created. Consequently, much of the more recent research in this area has used either SMSA's or cities as the units of analysis.<sup>1</sup>

There is also debate, however, as to which of these two units, SMSA's or cities, is most appropriate. The argument in favor of SMSA's centers around the fact that people who do not live in the city boundaries may well come to the city and be victims of crime. This may artificially inflate the homicide rate, as these victims are included in the numerator, but not the denominator, of equations computing homicide rates.

There is also evidence, however, that in some cases, cities are actually more appropriate than SMSA's. For example, Williams (1984) suggests that any research pursuing links between homicide and inequality should be performed on the city level. Such links appear to rest on the assumption that individuals perceive social differences in their communities and evaluate these inequalities as unfair. It is difficult to understand how people in the inner city could be sharply aware of the economic conditions of those in SMSA suburbs, or, even if they were, why this awareness should result in a generally higher concentration of homicides in the central cities.

American cities were chosen as the units of analysis for this project for a number of reasons. First, cities were chosen over states largely in the interests of replication issues. States have not been widely used in this type of research in recent years, and part of the focus of this project is to compare the findings here with other recent research. The reasons for choosing cities over SMSA's were somewhat different. First, issues of inequality are of interest here, and as Williams (1984) notes, cities are logically more suitable for analyses which have these concerns. In addition, the focus here is on homicides

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within the family, which are more likely to occur close to or in the home (Wolfgang, 1958), thus eliminating much of the potentially inflating effect of people from outside of the city being murdered there. Finally, this project also deals specifically with black homicide, and black Americans are less likely to reside in the suburbs, or surrounding areas, of major cities.

The 86 American cities with black populations greater than 25,000 in 1980 were chosen for the analysis to be performed here (see Appendix A for a complete list of these cities). This 25,000 population cut-off point was chosen for a number of reasons. A large enough black population to provide significant (and meaningful) homicide counts was required, which precluded the use of smaller cities.<sup>2</sup> Much recent homicide research of the type proposed here has used American cities with overall populations of 250,000 and over. As the national black population in 1980 was somewhat over 10% of the white population, 25,000 was chosen as the minimum black population for a city to be included in the analysis.

#### 4.2 Dependent Variables

As stated above, variations in black family homicide rates will be examined here. As a comparison, the variation in other relationship types of homicide, i.e., non-family, will also be reviewed. The focus is factors associated with the occurrence of family homicides among blacks, and whether or not they show any differences from all other homicides in which black Americans are involved. No attempt is made at the construction of predictive models for specific family relationship homicide rates (e.g., spousal, parent-child, or child-parent). Such a



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high percentage of homicides which occur within the family are spousal ones, that the examination of this as a separate category from family homicide in general, while a worthwhile pursuit, was considered to be somewhat redundant for the present purposes. In addition, the counts for events involving other specific family relationships (i.e., parents and children) within given cities are often so low as to make the construction of regression equations unreliable.

Acquaintance and stranger homicide rates were merged into a single "non-family" homicide rate category for a number of reasons. First, having only two categories of homicide provides for a clearer, less complicated analysis than does using three categories. Secondly, the focus here is primarily on family homicides--while conducting a similar analysis using both acquaintance and stranger rates would surely be worthwhile, it would also complicate the primary focus here on murders which occur in the family context. The interest here, and the chief object of examination, is not so much how the structural factors which predict homicide vary on the basis of the relationship between homicide victims and offenders in general as it is on the ways in which such factors differ when the parties involved are family members as opposed to any other relationship. Thus, while recognizing that there may well be interesting differences in the structural "causes" or predictors of acquaintance and stranger homicides, these two categories were combined here into one "non-family" homicide group in order to ascertain how and if homicides which occur among family members are different from homicides which occur simply between people who are not kin.

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One of the primary issues is how structural factors which influence the incidence of black homicide vary inside and outside of family relationships. Thus, the justification for examining these categories of homicide separately is to ascertain if the same independent variables are similarly related to each category of homicide, or if the effect of these measures is different when family members or others are involved. One of the major themes of this project is that homicides which occur within the family are different in some important ways from those which occur between non-family members. Many of the variations in patterns of black family, acquaintance, and stranger homicides reviewed in Chapter 2 suggest that such may well be the case. This part of the analysis will further investigate these differences, with respect to the behavior of structural (causal) variables.

An examination of the distributions of both relationship types of black homicide revealed that each was slightly skewed<sup>3</sup>. Square root transformations were performed on both rates, correcting for this skewness. The zero order correlation between the family and non-family homicide rate was found to be .37. While this would seem to indicate that some of the same factors may be associated with inter-city variations in homicides occurring in and out of the family context among blacks, it is still not a high correlation, given the fact that the variables being examined here are different aspects of a similar social phenomenon. Thus, while the homicide rates for family and non-family relationship categories are correlated, the association is not so strong as to suggest that there are no differences in the two types of events.

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The next step in the process of constructing predictive models was to examine the bi-variate relationships between the two relationship types of homicide and a number of independent variables.

### 4.3 Independent Variables

This section describes variables from five basic categories-- measures of income and economic well being, education, employment, family structure, and subcultural measures. It discusses why they were selected (including a brief review of their relationship to homicide and family violence as identified elsewhere in the scholarly literature), and gives their zero order correlations<sup>4</sup> with the two relationship types of homicide.

#### 4.3A Income Measures

The relationship between numerous forms of violence and income or economic well-being has received a great deal of attention in the criminological literature. In the homicide literature, one aspect of the research has focused on the difference in two aspects of poverty, i.e., absolute versus relative deprivation, and whether or not it is poverty per se or one's economic standing in relationship to others in one's social community which are important predictors of the occurrence of homicide. On the side of absolute deprivation, researchers such as Loftin and Hill (1974), Williams (1984), Messner (1983), and Plass (1984) all find significant positive between various measures of poverty<sup>5</sup> and total (i.e., non-disaggregated) homicide rates. Researchers such as Blau and Blau (1982) argue that it is economic inequality which is the more important predictor of homicide rates, and provide results of regression equations which confirm this (using the

gini index of income distribution as an independent measure of income inequality).

In non-aggregate level homicide research, poverty has also been found to be a common characteristic of individuals involved in homicide. For example, research has consistently found that significantly higher percentages of those arrested for homicide and other types of violent crimes are from low socio-economic levels (Swigert and Farrell, 1976).

Evidence of a link between poverty and non-lethal violence within the family can also be found in the family violence literature. Researchers such as Coleman, et al. (1980), Gil (1970), Roy (1982), Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980), and Steinmetz (1977) all provide evidence that individuals from lower socio-economic levels are more at risk to experience various forms of violence in the family.

The family violence literature also suggests that economic inequality between men and women may be seen as contributing to the incidence of spousal violence. In general, egalitarian marriages are found to be less likely to experience violence (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980; Coleman and Straus, 1990), that is, in relationships in which husband and wife have an equal balance of power, violence is less likely. In this same vein, researchers like Dobash and Dobash (1977; 1981) and Martin (1976) attribute the occurrence of spousal violence to a patriarchal family system, in which men have control (including economic control) over their wives. Conversely, researchers like Gelles (1974) and Hornung, et al. (1981) find that marriages in which wives have higher occupational status than their husbands are at greater risk to experience spousal violence.

Finally, there is also evidence, both in theory and research, which suggests that poverty and economic inequality may play a special role in the occurrence of black violence. For example, Sampson (1985), using the black homicide rate as a dependent variable, finds a significant and negative effect between the poverty rate (non-race specific) and black homicide arrest rates. In addition, Sampson includes a measure of racial income inequality (consisting of the ratio between black and white median family income), which is also significant, and negative, in models predicting non-white homicide offending rates.

Likewise, in the family violence literature, Cazenave and Straus (1979) find that while blacks overall have higher rates of involvement in non-lethal family violence, when controlling for income, blacks in the middle class are no more violent than are non-blacks.

In spite of the widespread acceptance of the relationship between violence and various measures of economic hardship, there is not a great deal of theoretical research available which explains why this should be so. One area of theory which does exist focuses on the issues of power and control, or the lack of it, in the lives of poor people. Those who lack access to other means of control in their lives are seen as turning to violence. For example, Hawkins (1986b) writes,

...such (socioeconomic) disadvantage generates sociopathological conditions in which violent crime among lower class blacks represents a socially disapproved, but predictable, effort to achieve some measure of control in an environment characterized by social, political, and economic powerlessness (Hawkins, 1986b, p. 125).

Thus, violence is seen as a response to the hopelessness of life experienced by those who are poor and see no way of changing their social position.

Writers such as Franz Fanon (1968) suggest that the oppression experienced by blacks in relationship to whites in America, and reflected in the higher rates of poverty among blacks, is also a factor which may effect greater involvement in violence by minorities. Fanon, in his work on the conditions of life for colonized black Africans, makes an argument for a psychoanalytic explanation of intraracial crime. He sees black on black crime as a form of repressed aggression. Members of the oppressed race who have not yet reached the stage of revolution against their oppressors, act out their violence and frustration against one another (Fanon, 1968). Blauner (1972) suggests that American blacks suffer from a condition of internal colonialism, resulting in oppression similar to that discussed by Fanon in Africa. Thus, intraracial violence can be seen as a sort of misdirected social action, in which oppressed groups with limited access to the elite act out their frustrations on one another. In this same vein, Valentine and Valentine (1972) suggest that increased intra-group violence among young black men may be linked to the increase of political awareness of oppression which came with the civil rights movement, without the means to bring about needed changes.

Other, less political, explanations of the relationship between poverty and violence focus on the increased level of stress in the lives of the poor, and its relationship to violence. For example, Straus (1990) finds a positive relationship between the incidence of marital

violence and levels of stress. Straus and Smith (1990) note that such life stresses are more common, and more severe, in the lives of the poor, especially poor minority members.

In light of the diverse literature on the relationship between income and violence, a number of different measures of economic well-being were gathered for examination in this project, intending to assess various aspects of relative and absolute deprivation of blacks in the 86 cities. These income variables deals directly with the economic condition of black families as a unit, and of black males and females individually, and in relationship to each other. The following are included<sup>6</sup>:

POOR	The percent of black families in the population living below the poverty line in 1980.
MINC	The log of median income of black families in 1980.
MMINC	The log of median income of black males in 1980.
MFINC	The log of median income of black females in 1980.
INCDEF	The average income deficit of black families living below the poverty line in 1980. This is, in effect, a measure of how poor those living in poverty are.
MFMINC	The square root of the ratio between the black male and black female median income levels in 1980 (male/female)
BWINC	The black to white median family income ratio (white/black).

The following hypotheses are put forth regarding the relationship between measures of income and economic well-being:

- 1) A. The greater the level of absolute deprivation, e.g., poverty, among blacks, the higher rates of homicide will be (i.e., a positive correlation).  
B. Similarly, the greater the income deficit variable (a measure of how severe poverty is for the poorest people) the higher the homicide rates
- 2) A. The greater the degree of gender income inequality among black men and women, the higher the homicide rates.  
B. The relationship between the gender ratios will be more marked for family than for non-family homicide rates.  
C. Similarly, the importance of black female income will be more important for the family homicide rates.
- 3) The greater the degree of economic inequality between blacks and whites, the higher the rates of homicide both inside and outside of the family for blacks.

The first two columns of Table 4.1 show the zero order correlations between the income variables and the two relationship types of homicide. One can see the relationships between each type of black homicide and each income variable. Although there is only one correlation that is high enough to be statistically significant, a number of interesting relationships are suggested. The highest correlation of any income variable is for INCDEF, the measure of the average income deficit of poor black families. The positive correlation of .33 indicates that, the greater the income deficit for black families, the greater the homicide rate. Income deficit is not a variable which generally appears in multi-variate analyses of homicide variation (for example, none of the studies cited above include this measure). As a measure of how severe poverty is for those who are poor, income deficit appears to be a theoretically interesting and promising variable for inclusion in the multi-variate analysis.



Table 4.1 Zero Order Correlations For Income Measures  
and Black Family and Non-Family Homicide

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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 NONFAM									
2 FAM	.37**								
3 POOR	.13	.11							
4 INCDEF	.16	.33**	.59						
5 MINC	-.11	-.14	-.81	-.45					
6 FMINC	.02	-.18	-.58	-.58	.65				
7 MMINC	.02	-.06	-.48	-.38	.81	.62			
8 MFMINC	-.01	.15	.19	.30	.07	-.54	.32		
9 BWINC	.02	.14	.27	.44	-.52	-.41	-.58	-.12	

\*\* p < .001 (significance is noted only between the  
homicide rates and the independent  
measures)

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NONFAM	Black Non-Family Homicide Rate (square root)
FAM	Black Family Homicide Rate (square root)
POOR	% of Black Families Below the Poverty Rate
INCDEF	Average Income Deficit for Black Families Below the Poverty Line
MINC	Median Family Income for Blacks (log)
FMINC	Median Income for Black Females (log)
MMINC	Median Income for Black Males (log)
MFMINC	Black Male to Female Median Income Ratio (log)
BWINC	Black to White Median Income Ratio

It is also interesting to note that the strength of the correlation is greater for the family than the non-family homicide rate, thus income deficit shows a .16 correlation with the non-family homicide rate, and one of .33 with the family homicide rate. In fact, almost all of the income variables are more highly correlated with the family homicide types than they are with non-family homicides.

The variables measuring the income of black men and women, and the ratio between these variables, do not show high correlations with any of the homicide rates. Note that, as predicted, the median income of black females is more highly correlated with family homicides than is the black male median income. All of the gender specific income measures are more highly correlated with family than with non-family homicide rates. Gender seems to be more an issue in family murders (the majority of which, as found in Chapter 3, occur between spouses) than in either other type of homicide. In addition, the correlations between racial income inequality and the homicide rates is much higher with the family rate (.14) than it is with the non-family rate (.02).

Columns 3 through 4 of Table 4.1 show that only one of the correlations of the independent variables with each other indicates that multicollinearity might be a problem in a regression equation in which all of these measures were used at once.

#### 4.3B Education Variables

The relationship between education and violence has received less attention than has that between income and various forms of assault. In fact, most multi-variate analyses of variations in overall homicide rates do not include a measure of the education of the population at all

(an exception to this can be found in research such as Loftin and Hill's (1974), in which a measure of education is included in the construction of the structural poverty index). Part of the reason for the lack of use of measures of education in predictive models is most likely the fact that education is seen as strongly connected with income, being either a direct cause or result of economic well-being. There is ample evidence, however, on a bi-variate level that those with low levels of education are more likely to be involved in homicide and other violent events (e.g., McClain, 1982; Mann, 1987). For example, Hawkins (1986b) cites a 1974 study of black prison inmates, writing,

...of black inmates being held for all categories of crime, only 21% were high school graduates or higher...Sixty-eight percent of all prisoners with less than an eighth grade education were charged with a violent crime (Hawkins, 1986b: 124).

The family violence literature also suggests that low levels of education are associated with higher rates of non-lethal assault within the family. Researchers such as Coleman, et al. (1980), Gelles (1974), Hornung et al. (1981), Hudson and McIntosh (1981), Steinmetz (1977), and Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) all find a negative relationship between the incidence of spousal violence and the educational attainment of one or both of the marriage partners. Other family violence researchers have found that educational incompatibility between spouses, i.e., when one spouse has significantly higher or lower educational attainment than the other, is associated with higher rates of marital violence (Gelles, 1974; Hauser, 1981; and O'Brien, 1974). Likewise in cases of child abuse, Hampton (1987) reviews literature which finds that

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black families in which child abuse occurs generally tend to be characterized by lower education levels.

Explanations as to why lack of education should be associated with violence have some similarity to those concerning the link between poverty and assault. Access to adequate education is certainly an important part of upward mobility, and of economic success. Education also provides people with a greater array of alternatives to violence. Insofar as violence can be viewed as the "ultimate resort" in maintaining power and resolving conflicts, knowledge of other means of accomplishing these same goals can be seen as an inhibitor towards violence. For example, education can be seen as a factor in giving individuals access to better verbal skills, and to better means of arguing and resolving conflict. The ability to talk out difficulties (coupled with the self knowledge that may come with greater education and allow people to be more in touch with their own needs and feelings) can certainly be seen as an inhibitor to violent interactions, especially those which occur in family contexts.

The independent measures of education gathered for inclusion in this analysis are intended to measure numerous aspects of the educational experience of blacks in America. As was the case for the income category, these measures are divided into two groups, those which measure absolute levels of education among blacks in general and those which are gender specific. Measures here include the following:

MEDED      The median number of years of formal schooling for blacks age 25 and older in 1980.

COLEG	The natural log of the percentage of blacks age 25 and older in the population with 4 or more years of college education in 1980.
HS	The percent of the black population age 25 and older who had graduated from high school in 1980.
FHS	The log of the percent of black females, age 25 and older, who were high school graduates in 1980.
MHS	The log of the percent of black males, age 25 and older, who were high school graduates in 1980.
MCOL	The log of the percent of black males, age 25 and older, with 4 or more years of college education in 1980.
FCOL	The log of the percent of black females, age 25 and older, with 4 or more years of college education in 1980.
MFCOL	The ratio between the percentage of the black male and female population age 25 and older who had 4 or more years of college in 1980 (male/female).
MFHS	The ratio between the percentage of the black male and female population age 25 and older who had graduated high school in 1980 (male/female).
BWMED	The log of the ratio between the median years of education for blacks and whites in the population (white/black).

The following hypotheses are put forth regarding the relationship between these measures of educational attainment and the three relationship types of black homicide:

- 1) The lower the level of education, the higher the rate of homicide in both relationship categories.
- 2) The greater the level of inequality between men and women in their achievement of education (as measured by the inter-gender ration variables), the higher the homicide rates.

- 3) Educational attainment for black females, as well as the inter-gender ratios, are more highly correlated with the family homicide type than with the non-family black homicide rate.
- 4) The greater the racial inequality, the higher the rates of both family and non-family homicide.
- 5) In general, the association between education and homicide is more marked for family homicide than for other types.

The first two columns of Table 4.2 shows the relationships of all the education variables to the homicide rates. The only significant correlation between any education measure and the homicide rates is that of  $-.28$ , between the percent of black women who attended college (FCOL) and the non-family homicide rate. The highest correlation for the family homicide rate is that of  $-.11$ , also with FCOL.

Although not statistically significant, the direction of the relationships between the education measures and homicide are as predicted, that is, indicating that higher levels of education among blacks (and lower levels of inter-gender educational inequality) are associated with lower rates of homicide in all relationship categories. (There are some exceptions to this, such as the negative relationship between some of the ratio measures and homicide, but the correlations in these cases are near zero).

Contrary to the predictions made above, education measures seem to have better correlations with non-family homicide than with either of the family homicide rates. Similarly, measures of black female educational attainment, or the inter-gender ratios, are not more highly correlated with the family than with the non-family homicide rates. It is interesting to note that the correlation between the male/female

Table 4.2 Zero Order Correlations for Education Measures and Non-Family and Family Homicide for Blacks

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 NONFAM										
2 FAM	.37**									
3 MEDED	-.15	.04								
4 HS	-.10	-.01	.91							
5 COLEG	-.24	-.11	.55	.61						
6 FHS	-.08	-.01	.92	.99	.57					
7 FCOL	-.28*	-.11	.41	.46	.96	.43				
8 MHS	-.13	.01	.92	.98	.61	.95	.50			
9 MCOL	-.19	-.01	.65	.72	.95	.67	.83	.75		
10 MFHS	-.17	.02	.22	.34	.43	.20	.35	.48	.47	
11 MFCOL	.13	.01	.41	.45	.04	.43	-.24	.45	.34	.23

\* p < .01    \*\* p < .001

NONFAM Black Non-Family Homicide Rate (square root)  
 FAM Black Family Homicide Rate (square root)  
 MEDED Median Years of Education for the Black Population  
 HS % of Black Population High School Grads  
 COLEG % of Black Population 4+ Years of College (log)  
 FHS % of Black Females High School Grads  
 FCOL % of Black Females 4+ Years of College (log)  
 MHS % of Black Males High School Grads (log)  
 MCOL % of Black Males 4+ Years of College (log)  
 MFHS Black Male to Female Ratio for High School Grads  
 MFCOL Black Male to Female Ratio for 4+ Years of College

college graduate ratio and the family homicide rate, while weak, indicates that the greater the percentage of black men with a college degree (as compared to black women), the greater the homicide rate. The direction of this correlation supports the thesis in the family violence literature which suggests that women with higher social status (including education) than their mates may be at greater risk of spousal violence (Gelles, 1974).

The same general finding applies to the relationship between the racial inequality and the homicide rates. The ratio between black and white median years of education is positively correlated with both homicide measures. This indicates that as levels of inequality in educational attainment between blacks and whites rise, so do rates of homicide. The bi-variate correlations between this variable and the homicide rates are, however, quite low.

Overall, measures relating to the level of college education among the population seem to have the best correlations with homicide rates. A college degree can be seen as more likely than a high school education to either better one's economic marketability (in terms of career options available) or to provide individuals with better non-violent conflict resolution skills. The relatively high correlations between these variables and the non-family homicide rate seem promising for multivariate analysis.

The correlations in columns 3 through 10 of Table 4.2 are not uniformly high, indicating that some of them may be able to be entered in the same regression equation, without causing problems of multicollinearity.



#### 4.3C Unemployment

Research regarding the relationship between unemployment and violence focuses on many of the same issues as are found in an examination of income. The overlap here is obvious, as one's employment status has a large effect on one's income. Few multivariate analyses of aggregate level variations in homicide rates make use of employment variables as a factor in explaining such violence. An exception to this is Sampson (1987), who uses multiple regression to show that unemployment among black men is an intervening variable which contributes to higher homicide rates, especially among juveniles, due to its effect on the disruption of black families (measured by the percent of households headed by women).

Research on characteristics of those arrested for violent crimes has shown that unemployment or underemployment are pervasive among these individuals. Hawkins (1986b) cites a U.S. Department of Justice study of prison populations which found that almost 40% of the black men imprisoned for violent crimes were unemployed in the year prior to their arrest. Other researchers have noted the relationship which exists between lack of access to adequate employment especially among black men and their involvement in violence. Harvey, for example, writes,

The oppressive nature of their living conditions could conceivably be tolerated by young Black men in these settings if they were able to secure employment that would begin to address some of their economic needs, while also satisfying their psychological need to meet the societally constructed definition of a "real" man as someone who works. The inability to realize this need...pushes young Black men into a situation where an alternate expression of masculinity becomes necessary. The expressive act(s), if conducted in a setting where it is interpreted by another male as

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threatening to his own masculinity, can result in argument, conflict, and even homicide (Harvey, 1986, p. 155)

A more direct relationship between unemployment and assault is also expressed in the family violence literature. In a national study of violence in American families, Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) find a close link between unemployment and the incidence of both spousal violence and child abuse (see Peterson, 1980, for a similar finding). In this research, Straus et al. go so far as to suggest that unemployment may also have an effect on the incidence of family homicide: "Our findings suggest that it would certainly not be unreasonable to expect that the rates, and deadly toll, of family violence would fluctuate with national and local rates of unemployment" (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980, p. 150).

Especially in the incidence of spousal violence, there is evidence in the literature which suggests that inequality in employment status between married partners may also contribute to the incidence of violence in the home (see Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980; Allen and Straus 1980). Staples (1986) writes of this aspect of the problem among black men:

Lower class black males often find themselves at a disadvantage vis-a-vis their wives within the family. As a result of their consignment to the underclass, they are often unable to provide for their families properly and have a problem maintaining status in the eyes of their wives and children. Because they are aware of their role failure, they are inclined to counter-attack any perceived challenge to their manhood with violence (Staples, 1986, p. 145).

Much of the evidence in the scholarly literature regarding the relationship between employment and violence or homicide would seem to

suggest that measures of unemployment could be important predictors of the two types of black homicide examined here. The following measures of employment are included here:

- UNEMP        The percentage of the black population age 16 and older in the labor force who experienced unemployment in 1980.
- FUNEMP       The log of the percentage of black females age 16 or older in the labor force who experienced unemployment in 1980.
- MUNEMP       The percentage of black males age 16 or older in the labor force who experienced unemployment in 1980.
- MFUNEMP      The ratio between the percentage of black males and black females age 16 or older in the population who were unemployed in 1980 (female/male)
- BWUNEMP      The ratio between the percentage of blacks and whites age 16 or older in the population who were unemployed in 1980 (black/white)

The following hypotheses are put forth regarding the relationship between these unemployment variables and the two relationship types of black homicide:

- 1) The higher the unemployment, the higher the rate of homicide.
- 2) The correlations between of unemployment is higher for the black family homicide rates than for non-family murder rates.
- 3) The greater the level of inequality between black men and women in terms of their levels of employment, the higher the rate of homicide, both inside and outside of the family.
- 4) The greater the level of inequality between blacks and whites in terms of their level of employment (with blacks having higher levels than whites), the greater the levels of homicide.

Table 4.3 Zero Order Correlations for Unemployment Measures and Non-Family and Family Homicide Rates for Blacks

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 NONFAM						
2 FAM	.37**					
3 UNEMP	.01	-.003				
4 FUNEMP	-.06	-.02	.91			
5 MUNEMP	.06	.02	.89	.63		
6 MFUNEMP	.11	-.03	.11	.48	.32	
7 BWUNEMP	-.23	-.05	.28	.39	.11	.32

\* p < .01    \*\* p < .001

NONFAM    Black Non-Family Homicide Rate (square root)  
 FAM        Black Family Homicide Rate (square root)  
 UNEMP     % Blacks Unemployed  
 FUNEMP    % Black Females Unemployed (log)  
 MUNEMP    % Black Males Unemployed  
 MFUNEMP   Black Male to Female Employment Ratio (log)  
 BWUNEMP   Black to White Unemployment Ratio

The first two columns of Table 4.3 show the relationship of unemployment to both types of homicide. Again, only one of the employment variables is significantly related to any of the homicide rates. The exception is the correlation between ratio between black and white levels of unemployment and the non-family homicide rate, which is  $-.23$ . The direction of the relationship here indicates that as inequality increases, with higher percentages of blacks than whites being unemployed, homicide decreases. This relationship is rather unexpected.

For the other variables, the direction of the relationship, is generally as predicted, i.e., a negative one for the direct measures and a positive one for the ratio variable. The correlations are not, contrary to the hypotheses made above, generally greater for the family homicide types than for the non-family homicide rate among blacks.

While the correlation coefficients are not significant, it is still possible that these variables will be useful in a multi-variate analysis predicting variations in homicide. Many of these measures of unemployment are highly correlated with one another, indicating that multicollinearity would be a problem in a regression equation.

#### 4.3D Family Structure Variables

There is evidence in both the homicide and family violence literature which suggests that some family structure variables may be useful in explaining and/or predicting homicide, both in and outside of the family. In the general homicide literature, such variables are usually taken as indicators of levels of social disruption or social disorganization in the community at large. For example, the percent of

children living with only one parent (along with the conceptually similar measure of the percentage of households headed by women) is found fairly often in the homicide literature as an independent variable predicting variations in murder rates. Loftin and Hill (1974) and Parker and Smith (1979) for example, use the percent of children living with one parent as an element of their structural poverty index. Likewise, Sampson (1987), as cited above, uses the percentage of black households headed by women in his analysis of variations in black homicide rates. The relationships found between such family structure variables and homicide rates are positive ones, indicating that as the level of family disruption rises, so does the rate of murder in a community.

The influence of measures of family structure on non-lethal violence which occurs only within the family context is outlined in the family violence literature. In this light, such measures are not seen as indicators of overall social disorganization (as is usually the case in the homicide literature), but as evidence of the effect such structures have on the nature of family relationships, and the tendency for violence to occur therein. There is some evidence, for example, that family size may be related to the incidence of family violence in general, and especially to child abuse (Coleman and Straus, 1990; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980), with the risk for violence rising with the number of people in a family. Similarly, being a single parent (i.e., measures such as female-headed households, or the percentage of children living with one parent) may be likely to increase one's life

stresses, which are also found to be associated with the incidence of family violence.

There is not a vast amount of racially specific family structure data available<sup>7</sup>. In light of the findings of other research, however, the following available family structure variables are included in the examination here:

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| FEMHEAD | The percent of black households headed by women.                                 |
| PPF     | The average number of persons per family among blacks.                           |
| PC<18   | The log of the percent of black children under age 18 who live with two parents. |

In light of other research in this area, the following hypotheses are put forth regarding the relationship between these family structure measures and the three relationship types of black homicide:

- 1) The greater the percentage of households headed by women, the higher the non-family homicide rates. However, the greater the percentage of female headed households, the smaller will be the rate of family homicide.
- 2) Average number of persons for family for blacks will be more highly correlated with the family homicide types than with the non-family murder rate. As family size increases, homicide within the family increases as well.
- 3) The greater the percentage of black children under age 18 living with two parents the lower both categories of homicide. This measure will be more highly correlated with the family homicide rate than with the non-family murder rate.

The first two columns of Table 4.4 show the relationships between the family structure variables and the homicide rates. The percent of black households headed by women is weakly correlated with both types of homicide. The direction of the relationship is positive for the non-

Table 4.4 Zero Order Correlations for Family Structure Measures and Non-Family and Family Homicide Rates for Blacks

	1	2	3	4
1 NONFAM				
2 FAM	.37**			
3 FEMHEAD	.06	-.11		
4 PPF	.01	.15	.33	
5 PC<18	-.33 **	.08	-.72	.11

\* p < .01    \*\* p < .001

NONFAM    Black Non-Family Homicide Rate (square root)  
 FAM        Black Family Homicide Rate  
 FEMHEAD   % of Black Households Headed by Women  
 PPF        Average Number of Persons per Black Family  
 PC<18     % of Black Children Below 18 Living with Both  
             Parents



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family rate, and negative for the family homicide rates. Thus, as predicted, as the number of households headed by women rises, family homicide falls, while an increase in this variable corresponds to an increase in the number of non-family homicides.

Also as predicted, the correlations between persons per family and the homicide rates are positive ones, i.e., as family size increases, homicide rates increase. These correlations are greater for the family homicide rates than they are for the non-family homicide rates.

Finally, the percentage of children below age 18 who live with two parents has a fairly high and negative correlation with the non-family homicide rate, as predicted. However, the correlations with the family murder rate for this variables are positive, indicating that the more children there are who live in intact families, the higher the homicide rate within the family will be. This would seem to indicate that the presence of a father in a family (as most children living with only one parent can be expected to live with the mother) increases the risk of family homicide.

#### 4.3E Subcultural Variables

Subculture of violence theory (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1968) has been called a dominant approach in recent years for explaining intergroup variations in homicide rates (Hawkins, 1986). Wolfgang and Ferracuti present the idea that there are certain sectors of American society whose cultures are in some way more accepting of (and therefore more conducive to) violent patterns of interaction. They contend that members of a subculture learn patterns of violent behavior from one another. "The more thoroughly integrated the individual is into this

subculture the more intensely he embraces its prescriptions of behavior, its conduct norms, and integrates them into his personality structure" (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1968: 155). When these "prescriptions of behavior and conduct norms" advocate or encourage violence, a subculture of violence exists. Thus, black Americans are seen to experience higher rates of violence than whites because of a greater degree of acceptance of violence in the black culture.

Subculture of violence theory hinges on the existence of pro-violent attitudes among the individuals which comprise a group. Little research has been conducted which actually proves that such attitudes exist among blacks. In fact, empirical evidence to the contrary, i.e., that blacks have no more (or even less) positive attitudes towards violence than do whites, exists (Erlanger, 1976; Blumenthal, et al., 1971; Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1980,). In many ways the theory has been used as its own proof in this regard, i.e., because blacks experience higher levels of violence, and because subculture of violence theory associates acceptance of violence with such behavioral patterns, blacks are assumed to have a more violent "culture".

All of this is not to say that subculture of violence theory has no value in understanding black violence. The enormous difference in the ways in which black and white Americans experience violent interpersonal interaction must surely be an indication of some fundamental differences in the two groups. It is possible, however, that the "subculture" could be more appropriately viewed as one of structural commonalities than as one based on social attitudes. Harvey (1986), for example, suggests that the "subculture of violence" which appears among American blacks is

in fact a symptom of the conditions of poverty and oppression under which blacks live, rather than merely a system of deviant norms accepted by this community. He writes,

The dearth of opportunities that are available for black people to accrue reasonable incomes through socially sanctioned employment, to live in dignity and self-respect, and to realize the same benefits and pleasures as whites, inevitably results in displays of discontent and outward directed aggression (Harvey, 1986, p. 155).

Harvey argues that the concept of a "subculture of exasperation" is more appropriate given the conditions of life for most black Americans. The poverty, joblessness, and lack of access to hope for a better future endemic to black life in America lead to a situation of frustration and hopelessness which often erupts in violence.

In view of the continued debate in the homicide literature as to the importance of subcultural variables in explaining variations in homicide rates, two commonly used subcultural measures were deemed important for inclusion in this project as well. The first of these is the percent of the population which is black. As stated above, this variable has been found to be highly significant in a number of aggregate level analyses of variations in overall (i.e., non-race specific) homicide (see, for example, Messner, 1983). The strong significance of the percent black variable has been taken alternately as an indicator of the existence of a subculture of violence among black Americans (Sillberman, 1978) and as a spurious sign of the mere magnitude of homicide among blacks (without connection to any subculture of violence theoretical explanations) (e.g., Sampson, 1985). As Sampson (1985) points out, the subculture of violence thesis suggests that the

percentage of the population which is black should have an effect not only on the overall homicide rate, but on the (specifically) black murder rate as well. The argument of the theory is that a certain threshold number of people committed to the subculture are needed in a community to make the variable a significant predictor. Thus, when large percentages of blacks are present in a given city, subcultural orientations towards violence are assumed to be greater. Sampson, however, in an analysis of black homicides, finds no significant effect of the variable as a predictor, calling into question the validity of the subculture of violence thesis in this instance.

The second subcultural variable is the South dummy variable, differentiating between location within and outside of the South. Similar to the percent black measure, a large (and old) body of literature in the field of aggregate level analysis of homicide rates has found levels of violence to be markedly higher in the Southern states (e.g., Hoffman, 1925; Brearly, 1932; Lottier, 1938; Porterfield, 1949; Shannon, 1954; Hackney, 1969; Gastil, 1971), and this variable is routinely found to be a positive predictor of variations in murder rates in regression analyses. Interestingly, the family violence literature does not show quite the same relationship between region and non-lethal violence which occurs within families. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980), for example, in a national survey of American families, do not find that family violence is more prevalent in the South than in other regions.

The following predictions are made as to the relationship between these subcultural measures and the two relationship types of black homicide examined here:

- 1) High percent of blacks in the population will be associated with higher homicide rates among blacks.
- 2) Similarly, presence in the South will be associated with higher rates of homicide as well. The rate of correlation will be stronger for the non-family than for the family homicide rate.

Table 4.5 shows zero-order correlations between these variables and the two homicide rates. As predicted, PCTBLK is positively, although weakly, correlated with both types of homicide. The Southern dummy variable is negatively correlated with the non-family homicide rate (indicating that location in the south is associated with lower homicide rates) and positively correlated with the family homicide rate. The association between South and the non-family murder rate is, as predicted, greater than that with the family homicide rates.

In the next chapter, the independent variables described here will be used in the construction of the "best fit" multiple regression equations examining variations in the family and non-family homicide rates in the 86 cities.

Table 4.5 Zero Order Correlations for Subcultural Variables  
and Non-Family and Family Homicide Rates for  
Blacks

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	1	2	3	4
1 NONFAM	1.00			
2 FAM	.37	1.00		
3 PCTBLK	.15	.09	1.00	
4 SOUTH	-.10	.06	.22	1.00

---

NONFAM Black Non-Family Homicide Rate (square root)  
 FAM Black Family Homicide Rate (square root)  
 PCTBLK % of Total Population Which is Black  
 SOUTH Southern Dummy Variable

Notes Chapter 4

1. It is important to note that proponents of state level research have suggested, rightly so, that the same diversity that exists within state borders often exists within cities or SMSA's as well. Just as one city within a state may be much richer or poorer than another, so one neighborhood within a city may be quite different socially from another. In spite of this argument, however, state level analysis has still not been as widely used in the field as has city and SMSA level.
2. For example, a city with a black population of 100, in which only one homicide occurred, would have a homicide rate of 1000 per 100,000. A city with a black population of 100,000 in which 1,000 homicides occurred would have the same homicide rate. While both figures are mathematically accurate, the result is that the same weight is accorded to one homicide event in the smaller city as is to 1,000 murders in the larger city. Thus, cities with small black populations were not included in this analysis.
3. The decision to transform these, and those independent variables noted below, was made on the basis of comparison of the mean and median of the distribution. A great difference in the mean and median of a distribution is an indication of skewness. The least drastic transformations possible were used to "normalize" a skewed variable. For example, the square root transformations used here compensates for mild positive skew. More drastic positive skew can be corrected by logging the variable. Histograms of the two dependent and the independent variables, in their natural (i.e., untransformed) forms can be found in Appendix B.
4. Note that means and standard deviations for each of these variables, in their untransformed form, may be found in tables in Appendix B.
5. These measures include median family income, percent poor in the population, percent of black population which is poor, and a "structural poverty index" (composed of infant mortality rate, percent of people age 25 and older with less than 5 years of education, percent of the population illiterate, percent of families with income under \$1000, Armed Forces Mental Test failures, and Percent of children living with one parent).
6. Transformations were performed as indicated for these independent variables, in order to correct for skewness in their natural distributions (cite someone here on this).
7. Most notable here is the lack of a racially specific measure of the divorce rate, which has often been used elsewhere in the homicide literature as a measure of social disorganization and family disruption.

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## CHAPTER 5

### MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF CITY HOMICIDE RATES

In this chapter multiple regression will be used to ascertain which, if any, of the independent measures reviewed in Chapter 4 are significant in predicting inter-city variations in black family and non-family homicides. Which social structural variables are significant predictors of variations in the two types of homicide? Do independent variables behave similarly in predicting black homicides which occur within the family and those which involve non-family members? Does the same regression model equally well explain variations in these homicide rates?

#### 5.1 Regression Strategy

The first step in the construction of OLS models for the two types of homicide was to identify which of the independent measures discussed in Chapter 4 were most appropriate. All of these measures could not be included in the same regression equation for a number of reasons. First, many variables within each of the five categories are conceptually similar, and may be considered as different ways of measuring concepts which are logically much alike. For example, within the category of income variables, the measures of median family income, of the percent of families which live below the poverty line, and of the average income deficit for poor families are all measures of the overall



economic well-being of blacks. So, while there is merit in examining each of the measures discussed in Chapter 4, and, as pointed out there, theoretical reasons to assume that they may have influence on the black family and/or non-family homicide rate, including all these measures in one regression equation would be conceptually redundant, and likely to be more confusing than enlightening.

Second, obvious problems of multicollinearity arise when attempting to include all of these variables at one time. As noted in Chapter 4 (and as will be discussed further below) many of the measures within a given category are highly correlated with each other. Including them in the same regression equation would almost certainly create problems of multicollinearity, which make the estimation of regression equations highly unreliable (Lewis-Beck, 1980).

A number of different methods were employed to discover which of the conceptually related variables within each category were most likely to be useful in OLS estimates<sup>1</sup>. First, the zero-order correlations presented in Chapter 4 were examined to ascertain which independent variables within each category were most highly correlated with the homicide rates. In addition, stepwise regression estimates, using forward elimination<sup>2</sup>, were computed for groups of independent variables which were considered to be conceptually similar, in an attempt to establish if there were one of these variables which was considerably more important than the others.<sup>3</sup>

Before beginning to relate the results of the regression models constructed, a word as to the organization of the chapter is appropriate. We will begin with a separate technical description of the

construction of regression equations for each of the dependent variables. Once the final models, and the mechanics of their construction, have been described, a discussion of these results will follow.

### 5.2 Predicting Black Non-Family Homicide

Before beginning to discuss what is in the model, it is appropriate to note what is not there (the meaning of these issues of "non-significance" will be discussed further below). First, none of the gender ratio or gender specific variables (with the exception of FCOL, i.e., the percent of black females in the population who were college graduates) were found to be significant predictors of either type of homicide. Their inclusion in various forms of the model only served to reduce both adjusted  $R^2$  values<sup>4</sup> and significance levels of other variables in the model. Similarly, none of the racial inequality ratio variables, with the exception of BWUNEMP (black to white unemployment rate ratio) were found to be significant predictors, or to add to the fit of the regression model, for either type of homicide. Thus, having noted what is not in the model, it is appropriate to move on to discuss what is there.

Table 5.1 shows the results of the reduced or "simplified" regression equation for the non-family homicide rate<sup>5</sup>. The adjusted  $R^2$  value for the equation is not terribly high (.15) and only one variable, the black to white unemployment ratio, is significant and negative at the .05 level, with a coefficient of -1.02. Both income deficit and the percentage of black children under the age of 18 living with two parents, however, are significant at the .1 level. The other four

Table 5.1 Preliminary Regression Equation Predicting Variance in Black Non-Family Homicide in 86 Cities

Independent Variables	B	Std. Err.	Beta	T-Value
INCDEF	.0007	.0004	.2590	1.92*
PC<18	-.0436	.0251	-.2435	-1.74*
BWUNEMP	-1.0173	.4867	-.2397	-2.09**
FCOL	-.1126	.3733	-.0389	-.30
PCTBLK	.2685	.8352	.0393	.32
POPDEN	.1389	.1989	.1051	.70
SOUTH	.0180	.2894	.0086	.06
CONSTANT	5.3421	2.9344		1.82

R<sup>2</sup> = .15

\*p < .10

\*\*p < .05

INCDEF Average income deficit for Black Families Below the Poverty Line  
 PC<18 The percent of black children under age 18 who live with two parents  
 BWUNEMP The black to white unemployment ratio (B/W)  
 FCOL The percentage of black females with 4+ years of college (log)  
 PCTBLK The percent of the population which is black  
 POPDEN The population density (log)  
 SOUTH Southern dummy variable (1=South, 0=Non-South)

variables in the equation have low levels of significance, and examination of correlations between the independent variables indicated that at least one, population density<sup>6</sup>, was highly correlated with other variables, thus creating potential multicollinearity problems. These four variables were subsequently dropped<sup>7</sup>, and a new regression estimate obtained.

Table 5.2 contains the result of this second regression. The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value has increased to .18, indicating that the four variables which were eliminated may have been complicating the model without adding anything to its predictive power. The remaining variables, income deficit, black/white unemployment ratio, and the percent of children living in two parent homes, are all significant at the .01 level. The coefficient for income deficit is positive, indicating that as the level of absolute deprivation rises among blacks, the non-family homicide rate also goes up. The ratio between black and white unemployment rates is, confusingly, negative, indicating that the higher the level of inequality in employment opportunity, the lower the non-family homicide rate. Finally, the percent of children living in two parent homes is negative as well, indicating that an increase in the percentage of black children who live in intact homes (with both parents present) rises, the non-family homicide rate falls<sup>8</sup>.

In summary, then, the results of the regression equation predicting inter-city variation in the black non-family homicide rate were as follows:

- 1) The only variables found to be significant predictors of the non-family homicide rate are the black/white unemployment

Table 5.2 Final Regression Equation Predicting Variance in  
Black Non-Family Homicide

Independent Variables	B	Std. Err.	Beta	T-Value
INCDEF	.0007	.0003	.27265	2.66**
PC<18	-.0592	.0177	-.3311	-3.35**
BWUNEMP	-1.132	.4349	-.2667	-2.60**
CONSTANT	7.043	1.1456		6.15

R<sup>2</sup> = .18                      \*\*P < .01

INCDEF Average income deficit for black families below the poverty line  
 PC<18 Percent of black children under age 18 who live with two parents  
 BWUNEMP The black to white unemployment ratio (B/W)

ratio, the percent of black children under age 18 who live with two parents), and the average income deficit for poor black families.

- 2) These independent variables account for 18% of the variance in the non-family homicide rate.

We will now move on to the construction of regression equations predicting variation in the black family homicide rate.

### 5.3 Predicting Black Family Homicide

The regression model for the black family homicide rate was constructed in a similar manner as that for the non-family equation, i.e., searching for the best model among the independent variables. However, a second concept was also at issue here, namely, to ascertain how the variation in family homicide differs from that in non-family homicide. To this end, two versions of the regression model were produced and will be discussed below, one with only relevant independent variables, and one including the non-family homicide rate as an additional independent variable. In essence, the latter equation examines the variance in family homicide which is separate from that in the non-family homicide rate. We will begin, however, with the examination of relevant social structural variables in predicting variations in the black family homicide rate.

Table 5.3 shows the initial regression equation for predicting variations in the black family homicide rate<sup>9</sup>. The  $R^2$  value in the equation is .11, and only one independent variable, income deficit, is significant, at the .01 level. A number of the other independent variables have extremely low levels of significance. The least

Table 5.3 Preliminary Regression Equation Predicting Variance  
in Black Family Homicide Victimization

Independent Variables	B	Std. Err.	Beta	T-Value
INCDEF	.0006	.0002	.4108	2.97**
PC>18	.0077	.0153	.0726	.51
BWUNEMP	-.3923	.2959	-.1554	-1.33
POPDEN	-.1798	.1203	-.2288	-1.50
PCTBLK	.0537	.5078	.0132	.11
FCOL	-.2263	.2270	-.1313	-1.00
SOUTH	-.2612	.1813	-.2094	-1.44
CONSTANT	2.6846	1.7841		1.51

R<sup>2</sup> = .11

\*\*P < .05

INCDEF	Average income deficit for black families below the poverty line
PC<18	Percent of black children under age 18 who live with two parents
BWUNEMP	Black to white unemployment ratio (B/W)
POPDEN	Population density (log)
PCTBLK	Percent of the population which is black
FCOL	Percent of black females with 4+ years of college (log)
SOUTH	Southern dummy variable (South=1, Non-South=0)

significant of these variables, percent black, was dropped from the equation, and the regression model was reestimated. This version of the equation had a higher  $R^2$ , .13, but income deficit remained the only variable significant at the .05 level.

In the non-family homicide regression estimation, it was noted that problems of multicollinearity arose surrounding the POPDEN variable. As a next step, this variable was dropped from the model, yielding a new equation with a similar, albeit slightly lower,  $R^2$  of .112. (The results of this regression equation can be found in Table C.1 in Appendix C.) Still, none of the variables other than income deficit were significant, although the other independent variables began to approach this level of significance.

The next step involved examining proportional leverage plots for each of the independent variables, in order to determine if there were one case which was confounding the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The plots revealed that three cities, San Jose, CA, Jackson, MI, and Fort Lauderdale, FL were having a large effect on the performance of one or more of the independent variables<sup>10</sup>.

The regression equation was reestimated, without these three cities. In this model,  $R^2$  values rose to .15, with income deficit and the percentage of children below the age of 18 who live with two parents significant at the .05 level. The Southern and the black/white unemployment ratio variables also approach significance in this version of the model. The measure of college education among black women, FCOL, remained highly insignificant, with low coefficients, and was subsequently dropped from the model.



Table 5.4 shows the results of this final regression model. The value of  $R^2$  is .16. The income deficit measure is significant and positive, indicating that as the level of absolute poverty rises, so does the family homicide rate. Other variables significant at the .05 level include the percent of children under age 18 living with two parents (with a positive coefficient) and south (whose coefficient is negative). The black-white unemployment ratio is close to significance at the .10 level, and, as was found in this variable's relationship to the non-family homicide rate, negative.

The next step was to add the non-family homicide rate to the equation, in order to estimate how variation in family homicide, separate from that which occurs outside of this context, is effected by the independent variables. Table 5.5 shows the results of this equation. The value of  $R^2$ , not surprisingly, rises considerably, to .24, and the non-family homicide rate is a significant and positive predictor of variance in family murders. Other variables behave similarly, in terms of significance levels and direction of coefficients. The coefficients for income deficit, black/white unemployment ratio, and South are lower, while that for the percentage of children living with two parents is slightly higher.

#### 5.4 Significant Findings

There are many issues to be discussed in relation to the regression models constructed above, both in terms of positive and of negative findings. There are a number of similarities in the regression equations constructed for explaining variance in the two types of homicide. For example, many of the same variables were significant

Table 5.4 Final Regression Equation Predicting Variance in Black Family Homicide Victimization

Independent Variables	B	Std. Err.	Beta	T-Value
INCDEF	.0007	.0002	.4610	3.83**
PC>18	.0285	.0125	.2643	2.28*
BWUNEMP	-.4068	.2831	-.1566	-1.44
SOUTH	-.3789	.1656	-.3105	-2.29*
CONSTANT	-.2673	.8595		-.31

R<sup>2</sup> = .16                      \* p < .05                      \*\* p < .01

INCDEF Average income deficit for black families below the poverty line  
 PC<18 Percent of black children under age 18 who live with two parents  
 BWUNEMP Black to white unemployment ratio (B/W)  
 SOUTH Southern dummy variable (South=1, Non-South=0)

Table 5.5 Final Regression Equation Predicting Variance in Black Family Homicide Victimization Controlling for the Non-Family Homicide Rate

Independent Variables	B	Std. Err.	Beta	T-Value
INCDEF	.0006	.0002	.3597	3.03**
PG<18	.0384	.0123	.3558	3.13**
BWUNEMP	-.2067	.2761	-.0796	-.75
SOUTH	-.3391	.1575	-.2779	-2.15*
NONFAM	.1980	.0635	.3223	3.12**
CONSTANT	-1.5138	.9079		-1.67

R<sup>2</sup> = .24

\*\* p < .01

\* p < .05

INCDEF Average income deficit for black families below the poverty line  
 PG<18 Percent of black children under age 18 who live with two parents  
 BWUNEMP Black to white unemployment ratio (B/W)  
 SOUTH Southern dummy variable (South=1, Non-South=0)  
 NONFAM Black non-family homicide rate

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predictors of variation in homicide both inside and outside of the family. In this section will be found a discussion of the significant findings in the regression models, taking each independent variable significant in either equation separately. Section 5.5 will deal with interpretations of the non-significant factors in the models.

#### 5.4A Findings with Regard to Income Measures

The fact that a measure of poverty was significant and positive predictor for both relationship types of homicide was not surprising. In the literature cited in Chapter 4, it was pointed out that the connection between economic deprivation and violence is fairly well established. The measure used here, the average income deficit of poor families, is, however, a unique one in homicide research of this type. It should be noted that income deficit performed much better than any of the other measures of economic well being examined here, and as such, it is worthwhile to consider what aspects of economic life it measures which the others do not.

Income deficit is largely a measure of the degree of deprivation the poor suffer, that is, how poor the poorest people are. The fact that this measure is so much more effective than other factors relating to economic well being, like family income or the percent poor almost certainly has something to say about the quality of life for blacks in America. The extent of poverty among blacks is so great that it is, at least in many locations within the United States, something which can almost be taken as a "given" in the black experience. While there is variance from one city to another in measures such as the percent of the black population which is poor, poverty is such a universal aspect of

the experience of blacks that its predictive power may be suppressed in regression models dealing with black homicide. While it is certainly true that conditions are worse for blacks in some parts of the United States than they are in others, it is also just as true that, generally, everywhere the economic condition of blacks is exhorable. The fact that income deficit, the only economic measure included here which can be said to consider how severe the experience of poverty is in a given city, was also the only one which was a strong predictor of homicide (of either relationship type) suggests that its sensitivity to this degree of deprivation for blacks is crucial.

The coefficient for income deficit in the equations estimating family and non-family homicide were identical (.0007), indicating that its predictive power is the same for both relationship types of homicide. This supports the findings of much of the family violence and general homicide literature, which suggests that poor people are more at risk for the experience of violence in all contexts than are non-poor people, and that high concentrations of poverty in a community make for higher rates of crime, both violent and otherwise. Presumably, as one's level of economic distress or deprivation rises, so do the stresses and difficulties of life, all of which are associated with higher rates of non-lethal violence in the family, and with homicide in all contexts (Bachman-Prehn, Linsky, and Straus, 1988). The significance of this variable in predicting family homicide, however, remained even when controlling for the non-family homicide rate, and its coefficient was only minimally diminished (.0005). The results of the regression models produced here suggests that while such deprivation is an important

factor in predicting variation in all types of lethal violence, it is especially important in estimating variance in violence which occurs within the family. Family members are certainly the most accessible victims for most people, as we spend the majority of our time in the family context. It is not perhaps surprising, then, that the level of poverty experienced by blacks takes a great toll within the family<sup>11</sup>.

#### 5.4B Findings with Regard to Family Structure Measures

The percentage of black children who live in intact families was found to be a significant predictor of both relationship types of homicide here. The direction of the relationship for this variable, however, was different. This indicates that while large numbers of children living with only one parent is associated with a decrease in the non-family homicide rate, the same situation is related to an increase in homicide occurring within the family. Two very different things are going on with this measure and the ways in which it relates to black homicide.

The negative association between the percent of children living in two parent homes and the black non-family homicide rate is consistent with findings and theory in the general homicide literature. As stated in Chapter 4, this variable is often used as a measure of family disruption, social disorganization, weak social ties, and the like, and is thought (and generally found in practice) to have a negative correlation with the homicide rate. Growing up in a single parent family may possibly (although not necessarily) correspond to more limited supervision for children and disruption in the socialization

process (see, for example, Rankin and Wells, 1986), all of which can be expected to be associated with higher rates of violence.

The fact that the number of children living in intact families is actually associated with a higher rate of family homicide is quite interesting. Obviously, as stated in Chapter 4, part of the relationship here is spurious in nature, i.e., more intact families translates into more married couples living together, which translates into more people at risk for the most common type of family homicide, that which occurs between spouses. However, a deeper and more interesting meaning can also be found in this relationship. Apparently, it is the presence of men in black families which is associated with an increase in homicides which occur in that context<sup>12</sup>. This certainly gives support to the idea that much of the non-lethal assault which occurs in families is "male driven", i.e., that men are most often the initiators (or the cause, if you will) of violence which occurs in families. This may also be taken as some support, albeit shaky, for the idea presented in Chapter 3 that black women kill their husbands so much more often than do white women because these husbands are more violent towards their wives, and because black women have more difficulty in leaving violent partners than do white women.

#### 5.4C Findings with Regard to Regional Measures

The behavior of the Southern regional variable in both regression models is quite interesting, and not consistent with some of the other literature in the area of general (i.e., non-race and relationship specific) homicide research. First, region was not significant in prediction of non-family homicides. The general homicide literature, as

cited in Chapter 4, almost uniformly finds that location in the South is associated with higher rates of murder. Such is apparently not the case with black non-family homicide. This lack of significance of the regional variable, however, is reflected in some of the homicide literature which deals specifically with the issue of race. For example, Sampson (1985), in his study of non-white homicide offense rates, also failed to find a significant effect for the Southern regional variable. Likewise, Plass (1984), found that when controlling for racial composition of the population and the percent of blacks who were poor, South was not a significant predictor of non-race specific homicide victimization rates as well. The findings here support the notion that much of the influence of region which is so often cited in the homicide research literature is indeed dependent on racial composition factors.

In the black family homicide equation, however, the South variable was significant, but negative, suggesting that location within the South is associated with lower rates of family murder among blacks. This is consistent with some findings in the family violence literature which suggest that Southerners are not more violent in the family context than are non-Southerners (e.g., Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) find that family violence is not more prevalent in the South than in the non-South). The findings here would seem to suggest that, at least for black Americans, and at least at the most lethal end of the family violence continuum, such is indeed the case. This may be taken as an indication that the higher concentration of black families within the South produce greater community social supports, which act as inhibitors



for family homicide. Familial isolation, which one might expect to be more limited in the South for blacks, has been associated with higher rates of non-lethal family violence (Finkelhor, 1983). The decreased level of opportunity for such family and/or community ties outside of the South may constitute what Cohen and Felson (1979) refer to as "an absence of guardians" in the criminological literature regarding routine activities, and their relationship to criminal victimization.

#### 5.4D Findings with Regard to the Unemployment Ratio

Probably the most confusing significant variable in either equation is the black/white unemployment ratio. The negative regression coefficients imply that the more the black unemployment rate exceeds the white rate, the lower the non-family homicide rate. There are no theoretical reasons to expect such a relationship, i.e., that greater inequality between blacks and whites should lead to less (non-family) homicide among blacks. A number of other explanations are possible. For example, the relationship may be spurious, and there may well be some other unknown factor, i.e., an independent variable not examined for inclusion in this model, which causes the levels of inequality between blacks and whites to rise at the same time as it effects a decrease in the rate of non-family homicide. Similarly, the relationship may be caused by a few aberrant cases in the data set<sup>13</sup>.

#### 5.4E Non-Family Homicide as a Predictor

The regression equation in which the non-family homicide equation was included as an independent variable (with family homicide serving as the dependent variable) also yielded several interesting findings which are worth separate comment. To begin, the fact that all of the

variables which were significant in the equation without the non-family homicide rate remained so when it was included as a control suggests that their effect on family homicide is separate from any outside factors which may be causing variation in the non-family homicide rate. The three variables which behaved differently in the family and non-family homicide regression estimates, the percent of children living in two parent homes (which was significant and positive for the family rate and significant and negative for the non-family rate), South (which was significant and negative for the family rate, and insignificant for the non-family rate), and the black/white unemployment ratio (significant and negative for the non-family murder victimization rate and insignificant for the family rate) have the same effect on the family homicide rate (in terms of significance levels and direction of the coefficients) when the non-family homicide rate is controlled for. The effect of one of these, the percent of children living in two parent homes, is actually increased when the effects of variance in the black non-family victimization rate are controlled. All of this suggests that the differences found in the behavior of the variables in the two equations are indeed differences, and that the effect of these variables in predicting inter-city variance in the family homicide rate holds even when other (unidentified) factors which may effect murders which occur outside of the family are controlled.

A further indication of the basic difference in the causal elements for variation in family and non-family homicide is the performance of the non-family rate itself when used as a control variable. For example, the value of  $R^2$  is increased from .16 to .24 when the non-

family homicide rate is included in the family homicide regression equation, thus implying that the non-family rate accounts for an additional 8% of the variance in the family murder rate, when controlling for the other independent variables<sup>14</sup>. While this is a relatively large effect (the largest for any single variable in the equation, in fact), the fact that it is no larger than it is also quite interesting, and lends support to the notion that the factors which cause homicides within the family are indeed different in some fundamental ways from those effecting non-family homicides.

#### 5.5 Negative Findings: The Significance of Non-Significance

In a sense, the "negative" findings of the regression models produced here, or the things that were not significant, are as interesting as those that are, and a discussion of these "non-findings" is merited. Many of the independent measures which the family violence and/or general homicide literature suggest might have an effect on homicides which occur within black families were not found to be significant, most notably, all of the education and most of the employment measures, all of the gender inequality ratios and all but one of the racial inequality ratios, all of the gender specific measures, and the subcultural measure, percent black. Finally, the  $R^2$  values obtained by all of the equations were fairly low (.18 in the non-family regression, .16 in the family equation, and .24 in the family regression model when the non-family homicide rate was included as an independent variable). We will deal with the issue of non-significant variables

first, and then comment on the overall low predictive power of the models.

A number of interpretations of the failure of so many of the theoretically important variables to perform as significant predictors are possible. Perhaps these factors are unrelated to homicides which occur in (or outside of) black families. While such an explanation is indeed possible, there are other interpretations which are possible. The most likely of these is that the relationship between the occurrence of homicides and such variables as educational attainment, inequality in social status for blacks and whites and for black men and women, etc. does not show up on the aggregate level. Recall that the regression equations were not designed to measure the antecedents of individual homicides, but factors which may be expected to effect differences in these homicide rates across a sample of 86 cities. The literature cited in Chapter 4 which suggests the importance of these measures in predicting the incidence of homicides among individuals cannot be dismissed, then, on the basis of the non-significant findings here. A test of many of these more individual level ideas would require data regarding the characteristics of the individuals who were involved in family homicide events (e.g., their levels of education, the degree of inequality between spouses in terms of income, employment, education, and the like). It is quite possible, and even likely, that the nature of the aggregate level of the data used here is inappropriate for detecting the importance of these factors in individual level homicide events. While it was not deemed unlikely that some of the "aggregate level counterparts" of these more individual level explanations might

have been important predictors of aggregate level variations in homicide rates (and many of these variables--notably measures of male-female inequality--were included with this in mind) such is not the case. Homicide rates in a city are, after all, different from individual cases of homicide, and the structural characteristics of a city which relate to variation in homicide rates may be expected to be different from those of individuals involved in homicide events.

The influence of these measures found insignificant here might well be more as predicted if a differently constructed data set were used. Homicide is a relatively rare phenomenon and, high as the rates presented here may be, the number of individuals who are not murdered certainly vastly outnumber those who are. The victims included in this analysis may well have suffered from higher levels of inequality, lower education and employment, and the like than other non-murder victims in their community. Their position at the extreme ends of the continuum for these measures, however, may not be picked up adequately by aggregate measures of these variables sufficiently to cause significant relationships in this analysis. Before abandoning the idea that the insignificant measures here have no relationship to the occurrence of homicide however, it would be necessary to, for example, compare the educational levels (or those of inequality, or unemployment, etc.) of homicide victims with those for non-homicide victims. Unfortunately, such data is not available at this time. It does, however, seem apparent that such characteristics of individuals involved in homicide are not reflected in aggregate level variations in homicide rates.

Alternatively, simple lack of variance in both the independent and the dependent variables may also have caused problems in the model. As stated above, blacks everywhere in the United States suffer from inordinately high levels of economic deprivation, unemployment, poor educational opportunity, and the like. Although things are better or worse from one place to another in terms of the distribution of these variables, it is probably also true to say that the socio-economic conditions of blacks in most places is generally not good. Perhaps a better approach would be to dichotomize some of these measures, in terms of "very high" and "relatively low". Such a dichotomy would give a better picture of areas in which both rates of family homicide and those of undesirable social characteristics were more or less prevalent.

Quite likely, the low level of  $R^2$  in the models is also related to the aggregate level of analysis used here, and its lack of sensitivity to some of the issues surrounding family homicides. Examination of the data also revealed a number of cities which were fairly extreme outliers in terms of a number of the relevant variables and their relationship to homicide (too many cities to be deleted). Thus, one must assume that there are a fair number of other outside factors effecting the inter-city variance in homicide which were not measured, with the result of low  $R_2$  values in the equation.

Overall, however, the regression models produced in this chapter have shed at least some light on the issue of what factors are related to inter-city variation in black family and non-family homicide, and on the question as to whether or not family homicides among blacks are basically affected by the same variables as can be seen as predicting

non-family homicide (thus, in a sense, being basically the same sort of event). Although some of the same variables were significant in predicting both types of homicide, there were also a number of differences in the results of the regression models, lending some support to the notion that family homicides among blacks are different from non-family murders in some fundamental ways. The behavior of the non-family homicide rate when used as a control in predicting the rate of family murder, offers further confirmation for this idea.

## Notes for Chapter 5

1. In addition to the methods discussed below, note that factor analysis was also employed as a strategy for grouping variables. None of the factors were used in the regression analysis, however, primarily because individual elements actually performed better than did any of the factors in predicting the homicide rates.

A second strategy was employed in the construction of indices for black/white inequality and for black male/female inequality (similar to Loftin and Hill's (1974) structural poverty index). As was the case with the factors, the indices produced were less highly correlated with the homicide rates, and were less efficient predictors, than were individual elements of a given index. This strategy of indexing, then, was likewise abandoned for the construction of the final models.

2. Forward elimination in stepwise regression operates by entering the most significant variables within the specified group first, then gradually adding any other variables which add to the significance of the model. If no other significant effects are present (or if none of the specified variables are significant at a given level) the model is "closed", thus including only the most important of a given number of variables. Work on this some more.

3. Note that all of the strategies outlined here were used in tandem, that is, the decision as to which variables were to be included in the model was made on the basis of information gathered from each elimination strategy, not just one.

4. Adjusted  $R^2$  is a form of the  $R^2$  statistic which, in a sense, takes the overall complexity of the model into consideration. Addition of variables, even insignificant ones, generally causes the  $R^2$  value to rise. The use of adjusted  $R^2$  compensates for this difficulty.

5. The variables included here were either the only ones from their category (as was the case with BWUNEMP) to have an effect on variation in the non-family homicide rate, were the "best fit" selections of a number of conceptually similar measures, or were included for initial examination because no other analogous measures were available.

6. POPDEN, or the population density of a city, was included here as a control variable. The population density is often used in the homicide literature in this capacity, and was included as a control here on the basis of these findings and practices of other similar research (cite someone here).

7. The variables were dropped one at a time, and in varying sequence, in order to ascertain if one was significant without the others. Such was not the case, and thus all four were subsequently dropped from the model.



8. Proportional leverage plots were produced and examined for the model, in order to check for outliers, etc. A proportional leverage plot is a special type of partial leverage plot, in which the relative "weight" of a case in effecting the form of the regression equation (relative to other variables in the model) is graphed with a "proportionately" sized symbol. "Leverage plots may reveal statistical problems such as outliers, influence, curvilinearity, or heteroskedasticity" (Hamilton, 1990, p. 121-122).

While there were a number of cases which exerted a fair amount of influence on the performance of the independent variables, deleting some or all of them did not make great differences in the results of the equation, or the performance of the independent variables included therein. In addition, tests were made for problems of heteroskedasticity, which was not found to be a problem in the model.

9. The variables selected for inclusion here were chosen in the same way as those for the non-family homicide equation. See above for explanation of this strategy.

10. Although leverage plots were examined for each independent variable, no extraordinarily influential cases were found for any of the other measures.

11. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to deal with this issue, it is worth noting that it is also quite possible that the level of economic deprivation has a similarly stronger effect on the rate of stranger homicides. As noted in Chapter 3, the majority of stranger homicides occur within the context of the commission of another felony (such as robbery or burglary), and as such, could be expected to be strongly effected by economic conditions (as economic deprivation is often the motivation for such felonies). In order to simplify the analysis and because the focus here was on family homicide, stranger murders were combined with those which occur between acquaintances, creating one category of "non-family homicide". If economic deprivation did have a similarly stronger effect on the stranger homicide rate, such would probably be obscured here, as the percentage of total non-family homicides which occur between acquaintances is quite high.

12. As an additional indicator of the veracity of this statement, note that the percent of black families headed by women (which is highly correlated with the percent of children living in two parent families), when substituted for PC<18 in the family regression equation, was a significant and positive predictor of family homicide. This measure was not significant, however, in the non-family regression equation.

13. Note that proportional leverage plots were checked for the non-family homicide model, with this possibility in mind. There were a number of cases which seemed to be exhibiting mild leverage in the performance of the BWUNEMP measure, but as the relationship only disappeared when a fairly large number of cases were removed, a decision was made not to drop them from the model. However, in a robust regression estimation (which, in a sense, weights extremely influential cases downward), the

significance level of BWUNEMP was somewhat reduced in the equation ( $p > .06$ ), suggesting that outliers may well have been responsible for the significance of the relationship here.

14. In a bi-variate regression equation, with the family homicide rate as the dependent variable, NONFAM produced an  $R^2$  value of .13, indicating that separate from other factors, the variance in the non-family homicide rate accounts for about 13% of the inter-city variance in family homicide.

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## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This project involved two parts--a description of demographic patterns of homicides which occur in the family context as opposed to those involving other victim offender relationships, and a multivariate analysis of structural factors which predict family and non-family killings. A number of important similarities and differences in these types of homicide have been related on the preceding pages. This chapter is intended as a final comment on the most important implications for the development of theory and future research in the area of family homicides which occur among black Americans. What evidence has been provided here that family homicides are different from those occurring outside the family? What appear to be the most significant of these differences? Finally, what implications for theory and future research can be taken from the analysis presented here?

The fact that family homicide among blacks may well be different from other relationship types of homicide in many ways has been well established here. In Chapter 5, the regression analysis revealed that a relatively small amount of the variance in family homicide rates was explained by the non-family murder rate. The descriptive patterns in Chapters 2 and 3 showed numerous differences in the occurrence of family homicides as well. Most striking and convincing of these was the relatively larger degree of change over time for family as compared to

other relationship types of homicide, and demographically, quite divergent patterns of relative involvement for men and women in the family homicide category.

The role of gender in relationship to family homicide is crucial, as the family is the context in which the relationships between men and women are most likely to be played out. This is underscored by the fact that the majority of all family homicides occur between spouses. The descriptive data presented in Chapter 2 also showed that it is in family murders that the victimization patterns of black men and women are most similar. While black men have higher rates of victimization than do black women in all contexts, the ratio between these differences was found to increase as the level of intimacy between victim and offender decreased. Thus, as described in Chapter 2, black men are almost twice as likely to be killed by family members, almost five times as likely to be murdered by acquaintances, and more than eight times as likely to be killed by strangers as are black women. The relative involvement of women (relative, that is, to men) is greatest in homicides which involve family members. The tendency for homicide to be a male perpetrated, male victimized event is much less marked in the family than in other relationship contexts.

This pattern of the (relative to male) higher female involvement in family homicides was clarified further by the examination of specific family relationship homicide victimizations, which showed that men are 1.3 times as likely to be killed by spouses, while in parent and child homicides their rates of victimization are roughly three times as high as those for women.

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The fact that the involvement of black women with homicide is most similar to that of black men in the family context, and within the family, in the spousal context, can lead to some interesting conclusions. The family is the relationship sphere in which the paths of men and women are most likely to cross. One might conclude from the evidence presented here that it is in inter-gender relationships that men and women are most similar in their patterns of homicide victimization. It is in the relationship sphere in which they can be most strongly expected to interact with men that the victimization patterns of females most strongly resemble those of males. I have suggested that it is men who set the context for violent interactions in these relationships, and that the high incidence of spousal homicide is the result of higher tendency towards violence among black men. Even the fact that men are more likely to be killed by a spouse than women can be taken as evidence of this, given the fact that so many spousal murders are victim precipitated (Wolfgang, 1958; Browne, 1987).

I have further suggested that, within the context of spousal homicide, black women kill their husbands at higher rates than black men kill their wives because of the special difficulties, both structural/cultural and emotional, which black women have in leaving violent relationships. All of this seems to lend support to the notion found in much of the family violence literature that it is men who set the tone for violent relationships. Results of the multivariate analysis, which showed the percentage of black children who live in two parent families to be a significant and positive predictor of family

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homicide (while the same variable was significant and negative in predicting non-family homicides) offer further support for this idea.

A crucial question for future research, and for the development of theory, then, is why are black men so violent in their families, and why are black women so much more likely than women from other racial/ethnic groups to kill those violent husbands, rather than using other means of "escape"? The question as to why black men experience and perpetrate such high levels of interpersonal violence has long been an issue in research on homicide in the general context. The answers, or speculation as to what these answers might be, have centered on the experiences of racism, oppression, the inability to achieve fulfillment of culturally prescribed roles for males in our society (e.g., money maker, etc.) and the like. I have suggested that the same factors play a role in family violence (and homicide) among blacks--perhaps even a special role, as family members are both easily accessible targets and reminders of the failures black men may experience as a result of societally produced oppression. In addition, one who is or feels powerless in the larger social world may choose to exert a brutal power in his personal sphere. It may, in fact, be only in the family context that some men may be able to express and fulfill their needs for power and control.

I have also suggested that black women do not take themselves and their children out of violent families for a number of conceptually related reasons. The same oppression, joblessness, poverty, and racism which effects black men is also part of the experience of black women. Making it as a single parent is difficult in the best of scenarios, and

when the options for fulfillment and self actualization are so slight in the public sphere, maintaining family ties--even painful or dangerous ones--may be even more important. In addition, the alternatives for black women in finding other life partners are limited for a number of reasons (see Chapter 3), including a relative shortage of black men in the population--conditions which may make the likelihood of leaving a violent relationship before that violence becomes lethal less appealing and less likely.

Future research which might begin to more fully respond to these issues should fall into two separate categories. The multivariate analysis presented here failed to show a significant effect for a number of measures (notably things like education, employment, and male/female inequality) for which there is theoretical reason to suspect might be related to the occurrence of family homicides (see Chapter 4). It may be that the characteristics of individuals which lead them to kill family members are somewhat different from the structural forces which create larger, aggregate level variations in the rates of family homicide victimizations. Future research should be designed to address both of these questions, i.e., what are the characteristics and motivations of individuals who kill family members, and what are the larger socio-structural factors which might be expected to cause larger or smaller rates of family homicide from one community to another?

On the level of identifying individual characteristics of homicide victims and their life situations, a crucial element for research is personal interviews with offenders and other survivors in the family sphere. For example, the question of why black women kill their

husbands at such high rates (and whether or not these patterns of homicide really are related to higher levels of male violence, lack of perceived alternatives to violent relationships, and the like) can really only be answered by the women who are involved in these murders, and by careful examination of things like their own socio-economic characteristics and their relationship to those of their partners. Even the best data collected by the FBI or other law enforcement agencies cannot tell us about power relations in the family, about hopelessness and oppression, and of the role such factors may play in the occurrence of a homicide event.

On the aggregate level, a good starting place might be further examination of structural factors which increase or decrease access to alternatives to living in violent families. Things such as the response of police agencies to incidents of domestic violence among blacks, the involvement (or lack of it) in the shelter movement by black women, the availability of and access to parenting training for blacks, the availability of and access to programs designed to assist in the care of the elderly, and the degree of social isolation for black families<sup>1</sup> are all areas which deserve more attention in this level of research.

In addition to examination of different types of social-structural measures, aggregate level research might pursue a more dichotomized analysis of family (and other relationship types) homicide among blacks. As stated in Chapter 5, the level of social ills, such as homicide, poverty, unemployment, etc., is so much a "given" among blacks in America, that there is not a great deal of variance from one place to another. Examination of dichotomized measures (divided, for example, on



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the basis of "high" versus "low" rates of family homicide among blacks) might be a fruitful avenue of research, and compensate for many of the problems of insignificant relationships between variables and low levels of explanatory power in regression models which were found in Chapter 5.

Homicide among blacks in America has reached near epidemic proportion, so much so that groups like the Center for Disease Control have begun to turn their attention to this violence as a serious public health risk. The magnitude of the toll of death and suffering from the incidence of homicides and violence which occur in families is increasingly apparent, both from the standpoint of social research and reading of the daily newspaper. This project has offered a beginning at increased understanding of the ways in which homicide occurs between blacks in this specific context of family relations. A great deal more work with such a specific focus is needed if we are to adequately understand this problem, and better arm ourselves as a society to quell this insidious epidemic of violence.

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Notes Chapter 6

1. The fact that the Southern regional variable was found to be associated with a decrease or a lower rate of family homicides, coupled with the fact that larger concentrations of black families are found in the South, is one indication of the potential importance of such measures of isolation. Other variables for examination here might include such things as the level of involvement in church or other community groups by blacks, and other factors which could be expected to decrease social isolation of families, and increase access to supportive and positive cultural allies.

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APPENDIX A

Cities in the Multivariate Analysis

Birmingham, Alabama	Omaha, Nebraska
Huntsville, Alabama	Jersey City, New Jersey
Mobile, Alabama	Newark, New Jersey
Phoenix, Arizona	Patterson, New Jersey
Little Rock, Arkansas	Buffalo, New York
Long Beach, California	New York City, New York
Los Angeles, California	Rochester, New York
Oakland, California	Charlotte, North Carolina
Sacramento, California	Greensboro, North Carolina
San Diego, California	Raleigh, North Carolina
San Francisco, California	Winston-salem, North Carolina
San Jose, California	Akron, Ohio
Denver, Colorado	Cincinnati, Ohio
Bridgeport, Connecticut	Cleveland, Ohio
Hartford, Connecticut	Columbus, Ohio
New Haven, Connecticut	Dayton, Ohio
Washington, D.C.	Toledo, Ohio
Fort Lauderdale, Florida	Youngstown, Ohio
Jacksonville, Florida	Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Miami, Florida	Tulsa, Oklahoma
Orlando, Florida	Portland, Oregon
St. Petersburg, Florida	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tampa, Florida	Pittsburg, Pennsylvania
Atlanta, Georgia	Chattanooga, Tennessee
Columbus, Georgia	Memphis, Tennessee
Macon, Georgia	Nashville, Tennessee
Savannah, Georgia	Austin, Texas
Chicago, Illinois	Beaumont, Texas
Gary, Indiana	Dallas, Texas
Indianapolis, Indiana	Fort Worth, Texas
Dansas City, Dansas	Houston, Texas
Wichita, Kansas	San Antonio, Texas
Louisville, Kentucky	Chesapeake, Virginia
Baton Rouge, Louisiana	Hampton, Virginia
New Orleans, Louisiana	Newport, Virginia
Shreveport, Louisiana	Norfolk, Virginia
Baltimore, Maryland	Portsmouth, Virginia
Boston, Massachusetts	Richmond, Virginia
Detroit, Michigan	Seattle, Washington
Flint, Michigan	Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Grand Rapids, Michigan	
Minneapolis, Minnesota	
Jackson, Mississippi	
Kansas City, Missouri	
Saint Louis, Missouri	

APPENDIX B

Summary Statistics and Histograms  
For Regression Analysis Variables

Table B.1 Summary Statistics for Income Measures and for Black Family and Non-Family Homicide Rates

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>Min.</u>	<u>Max.</u>
FAM	6.79	3.22	1.54	16.49
NONFAM	28.82	11.53	5.06	79.01
POOR	27.14	5.34	13.60	41.60
INCDEF	3393.97	397.74	2594.00	4774.00
MINC	12644.24	2002.97	9725.00	21279.00
FMINC	4789.67	863.65	3329.00	7431.00
MMINC	8377.08	1474.33	6534.00	15231.00
MFMINC	1.77	.28	1.30	3.12
BWINC	1.64	.23	1.11	2.18

FAM	Black Family Homicide Rate (per 100,000)
NONFAM	Black Non-Family Homicide Rate (per 100,000)
POOR	% of Black Families Below the Poverty Rate
INCDEF	Average Income Deficit for Black Families Below the Poverty Line
MINC	Median Family Income for Blacks
FMINC	Median Income for Black Females
MMINC	Median Income for Black Males
MFMINC	Black Male to Female Median Income Ratio (Male/Female)
BWINC	Black to White Median Income Ratio (White/Black)

Table B.2 Summary Statistics for Education Measures

---

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>Min.</u>	<u>Max.</u>
MEDED	11.99	.47	10.30	13.00
HS	53.94	8.16	36.55	81.38
COLEG	8.67	3.24	3.99	18.54
FHS	54.24	7.76	36.80	79.90
FCOL	8.51	3.22	3.26	18.46
MHS	53.51	8.83	36.20	82.80
MCOL	8.83	3.54	3.42	21.94
MFHS	.99	.05	.88	1.18
MFCOL	1.06	.23	.66	1.96
BWMED	1.06	.06	.84	1.34

---

MEDED Median Years of Education for Blacks  
 HS % of Black Population High School Graduates  
 COLEG % of Black Population with 4+ Years of College  
 FHS % of Black Females High School Graduates  
 FCOL % of Black Females with 4+ Years of College  
 MHS % of Black Males High School Graduates  
 MCOL % of Black Males with 4+ Years of College  
 MFHS Ratio of Black Male to Female % High School Grads (M/F)  
 MFCOL Ratio of Black Male to Female 4+ Yrs. College (M/F)  
 BWMED Ratio of Black to White Median Years of Education (W/B)

Table B.3 Summary Statistics for Unemployment Measures

---

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>Min.</u>	<u>Max.</u>
UNEMP	27.79	4.05	19.47	38.82
FUNEMP	27.97	4.67	19.37	45.81
MUNEMP	27.62	4.35	19.59	39.79
MFEMP	1.01	.06	.91	1.30
BWUNEMP	1.56	.25	1.10	2.31

---

UNEMP % Blacks Unemployed  
 FUNEMP % Black Females Unemployed  
 MUNEMP % Black Males Unemployed  
 MFEMP Black Male to Female Employment Rate Ratio (M/F)  
 BWUNEMP Black to White Unemployment Ratio (B/W)

Table B.4 Summary Statistics for Family Structure and Subculture Measures

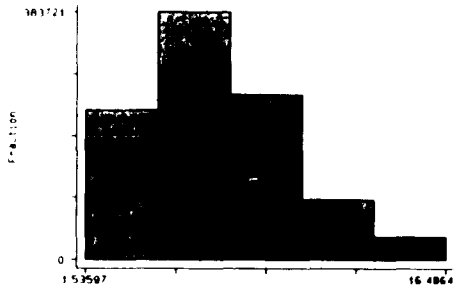
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<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>Min.</u>	<u>Max.</u>
FEMHEAD	28.99	3.65	19.55	37.62
PPF	3.60	.15	3.28	3.89
PC<18	41.34	5.85	30.50	58.50
PCTBLK	30.30	15.30	4.6	70.84

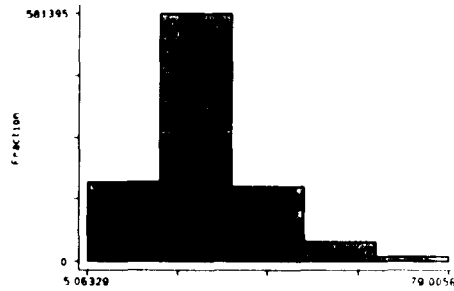
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FEMHEAD Percent of black households headed by women  
 PPF Number of persons per family for blacks  
 PC<18 Percent of black children under age 18 living with 2  
 parents  
 PCTBLK Percent of the population which is black

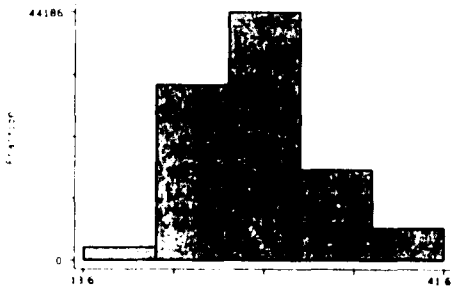




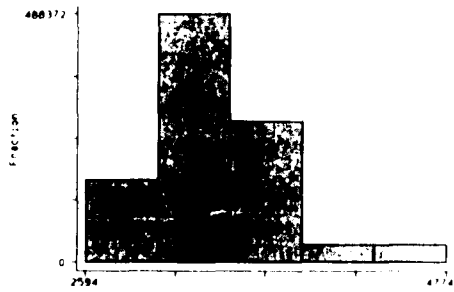
Histogram 1 Black Family Homicide Rates



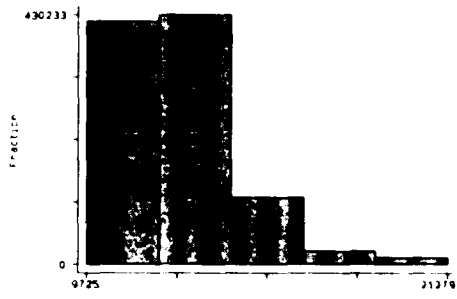
Histogram 2 Black Non-Family Homicide Rates



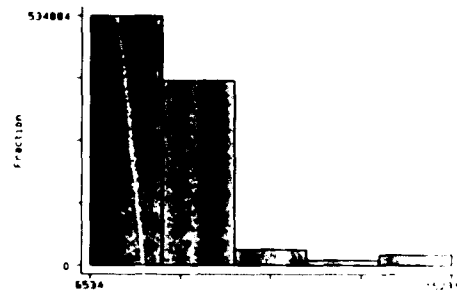
Histogram 3 % of Black Families Below Poverty Level



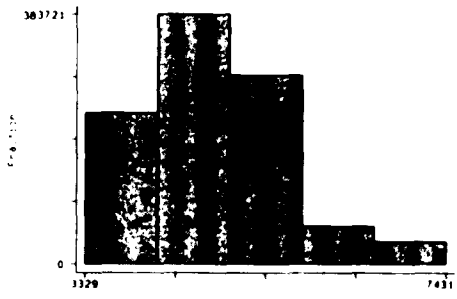
Histogram 4 Income Deficit for Black Families



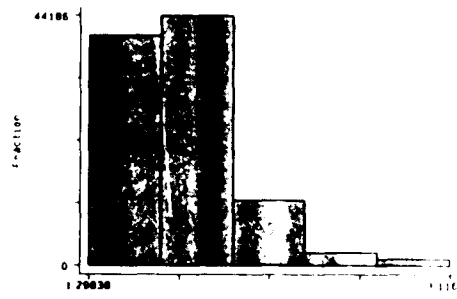
Histogram 5 Median Black Family Income



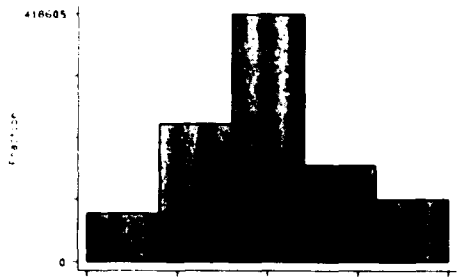
Histogram 6 Median Income Black Males



Histogram 7 Median Income Black Females



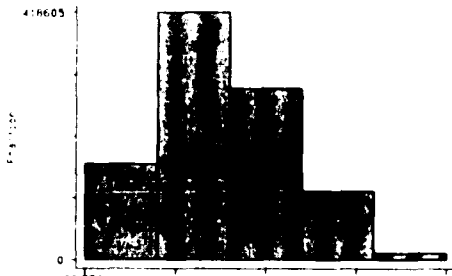
Histogram 8 Black Male to Female Income Ratio



Histogram 9 White to Black Income Ratio



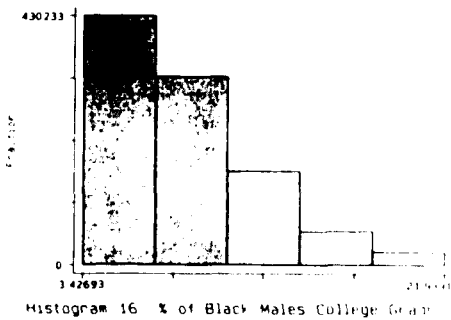
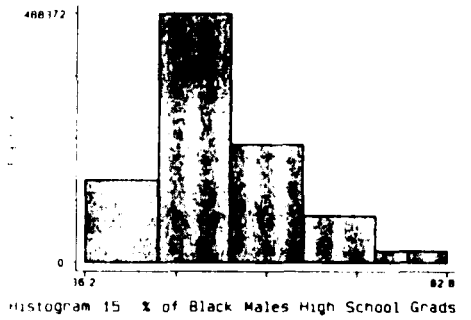
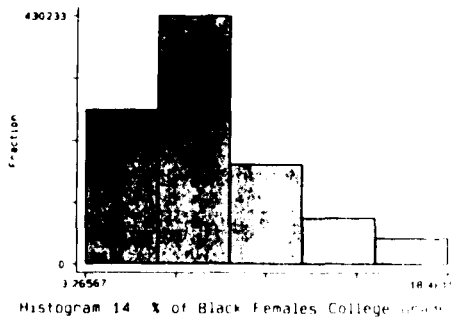
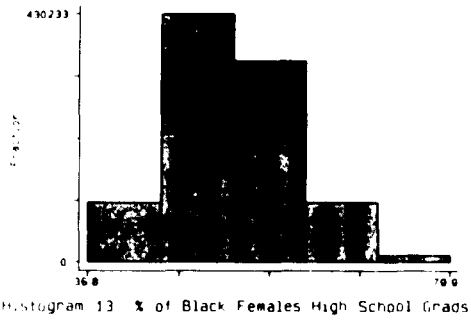
Histogram 10 Median Years of Education for Blacks

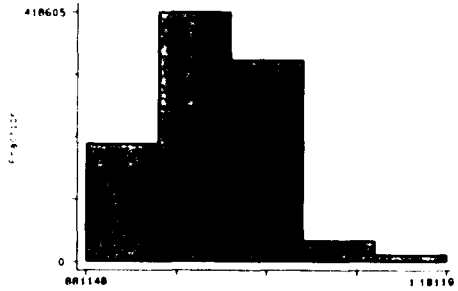


Histogram 11 Percent of Blacks High School Grads

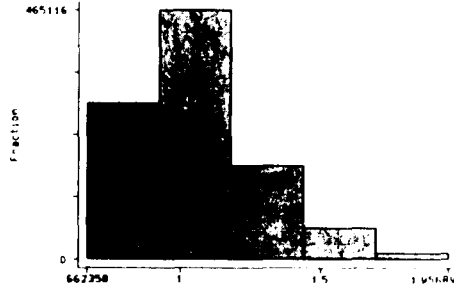


Histogram 12 Percent of Blacks College Grads





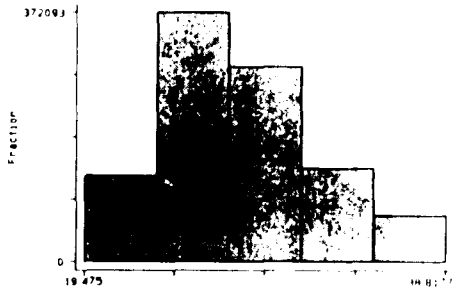
Histogram 17 Black Male to Female High School Ratio



Histogram 18 Black Male to Female College Ratio



Histogram 19 White to Black Median Education Ratio



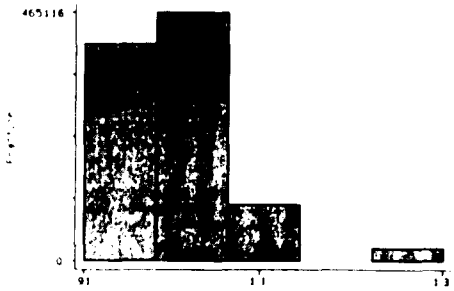
Histogram 20 Percent Black unemployed



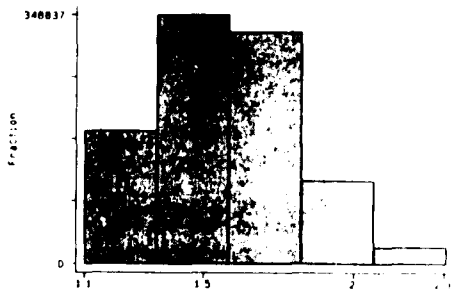
Histogram 21 Percent Black Females Unemployed



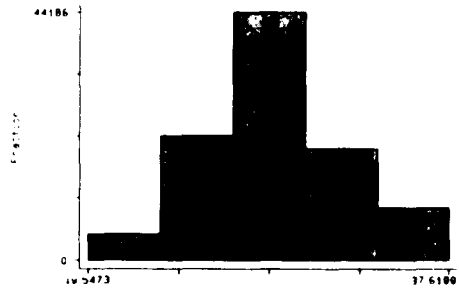
Histogram 22 Percent Black Males Unemployed



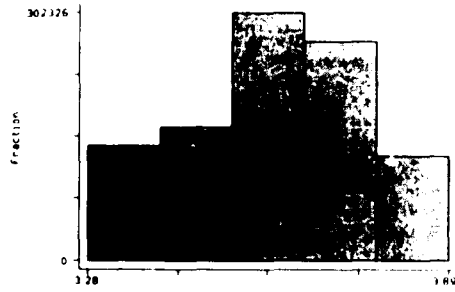
Histogram 23 Black Male to Female Unemployment Ratio



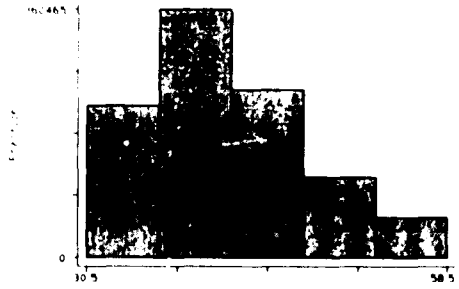
Histogram 24 Black to White Unemployment Ratio



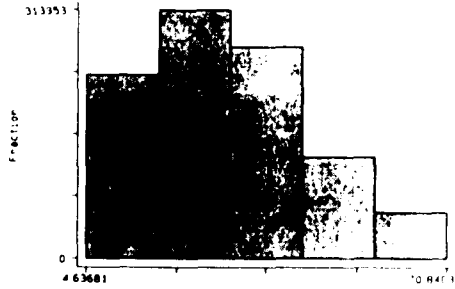
Histogram 25 % of Black Households Headed by Women



Histogram 26 Number of Persons per Black Family



Histogram 27 % of Blacks < 18 Living with 2 Parents



Histogram 28 Percent Black in Population

APPENDIX C

Intermediate Regression Equation

Table C.1 Intermediate Regression Equation Predicting Variance  
in Black Family Homicide Victimization

Independent Variables	B	Std. Err.	Beta	T-Value
INCDEF	.0007	.0002	.4222	3.33**
PG<18	.0184	.0134	.1725	1.37
BWUNEMP	-.2750	.2806	-.1090	-.98
FCOL	-.1906	.2258	-.1112	-.85
SOUTH	-.1906	.1751	-.1528	-1.09
CONSTANT	.4403	.9384		.47
R <sup>2</sup> = .112		** p < .01		