CJ *bulletin*

Criminal Justice Research Division, SANDAG

San Diego Violent Crime Victims and Suspects in 2009

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A SANDAG CJ BULLETIN

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SAN DIEGO VIOLENT CRIME VICTIMS AND SUSPECTS IN 2009

INTRODUCTION

This SANDAG CJ bulletin, one of three in a series presenting 2009 annual crime information, includes crime and arrest report data from local law enforcement agencies regarding characteristics of violent crime victims and suspects. Analyses are presented regarding which population subgroups were more likely to report being victimized in 2009, as well as how victims and suspects differed by crime type in terms of their ethnicity, age, and gender.

In 2008 the content of this bulletin was modified to focus exclusively on violent crime.[1] When reporting property crimes, overall there is inconsistency in who is listed as the victim, which makes it difficult to accurately document the characteristics of the actual victim. As such, only data on violent crime victims and suspects are presented. Historically, there has been little to no change in the characteristics of victims of violent crime over the years (with the exception of homicide victims); therefore, this bulletin is produced bi-annually. Because of this lack of change from year to year, only 2009 data are presented, which provides an accurate description of violent crime victims in the region since the last report.

This information, which is provided nearly one year prior to the release of these data nationally, is useful to those interested in better understanding who is affected by violent crime in our region. This information also is used to help develop and monitor targeted prevention and intervention strategies.

FAST FACTS
2009 VICTIMS AND SUSPECTS

- **An argument (31%) was the most common precipitating event for homicide, followed by gang activity (26%).**
- **Females were more likely to be homicide victims as a result of domestic violence (50%) and males as a result of an argument (38%) or a gang incident (30%).**
- **Blacks and Hispanics were overrepresented as victims of homicide, rape, robbery, and assault in comparison to their representation in the population.**
- **A firearm was used in over half (54%) of homicides.**
- **Over one in four (28%) rape victims was under the age of 18 years old.**
- **Children and young teens were suspects in about one-quarter (26%) of robberies and one in ten rapes (11%) and assaults (11%).**
- **Overall, females comprised 51 percent of crime victims, but only 24 percent of suspects.**

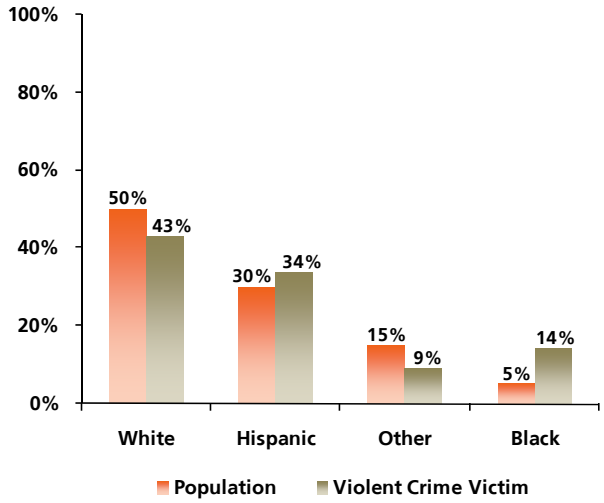
[1] Violent crime includes homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO REPORT BEING A VIOLENT CRIME VICTIM?

Race/Ethnicity

In 2009 half (50%) of the San Diego region's population was non-Hispanic White, around one-third (30%) Hispanic, 15 percent represented "other" ethnicities, and 5 percent non-Hispanic Black (Figure 1). As in prior years, these proportions differed from the ethnicity of violent crime victims. Specifically, Blacks were nearly three times as likely to be a victim of a violent crime compared to their representation in the population (14% versus 5%). Conversely, Whites were under-represented (43% versus 50%) as violent crime victims, as were individuals of "other" ethnicities (9% versus 15%). The proportion of Hispanic victims (34%) was slightly more than their representation in the population (30%).

Figure 1
Victimization Differs by Ethnicity



SOURCE: Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS) 2009 and SANDAG 2010 Statistics

A closer examination of ethnicity also revealed differences among the types of violent crimes of which individuals were victims. Specifically, Blacks were four times more likely to be a victim of homicide (19%), twice as likely to be a victim of robbery (10%) or rape[2] (11%), and three times as likely to be assaulted (15%) than their representation in the population (5%). Additionally, Hispanic victims accounted for over one-third of homicides (35%) and 39 percent of robbery victims in comparison to comprising 30 percent of the population. With the exception of rape (52%), Whites were underrepresented in all violent crime categories in comparison to their representation in the population, as were individuals of "other" ethnicities (Table 1).

According to the NCVS, victims reported 47% of violent crimes and 40% of property crime to police in 2008.

National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), 2009

Table 1
Type of Violent Crime Victimization Varies by Ethnicity

	White	Hispanic	Other	Black
Homicide	39%	35%	8%	19%
Robbery	39%	39%	12%	10%
Aggravated Assault	44%	33%	8%	15%
Rape	52%	31%	6%	11%

SOURCE: Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS) and SANDAG 2010 Statistics

[2] According to Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) standards for the crime of rape, all victims are females and all suspects are male.

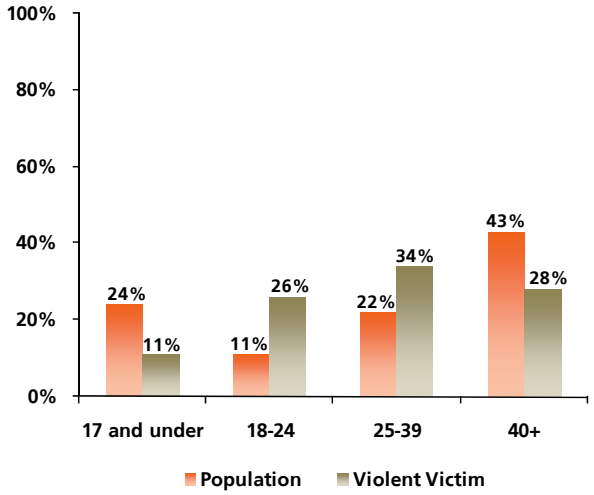
Age

As with ethnicity, there were differences in victimization by age, with young adults comprising a higher proportion of victims in comparison to their representation to the population. According to 2010 estimates, 24 percent of the region's population was 17 years and under, 11 percent between the ages of 18 and 24, 22 percent between 25 and 39, and 43 percent 40 years of age and older (Figure 2). Individuals ages 25 to 39 accounted for the largest percentage of violent crime victims (34%), which was higher than their proportion in the population (22%). Additionally, individuals 18 to 24 years old were over twice as likely to be victims of a violent crime compared to their proportion in the population (26% versus 11%, respectively). Individuals 40 years of age and older were underrepresented as violent crime victims (28% versus 43%), as were youth 17 years of age and younger (11% of victims and 24% of population).

> *According to NCVS, persons age 50 and older had the lowest violent crime rate and persons ages 12 to 24 had the highest.*
>
> **NCVS 2009**

However, these proportions varied by crime type. Specifically, younger individuals were over twice as likely as their proportion in the population to be victims of rape (28% age 17 and under and 32% of 18 to 24 year-old females). It is important to note that these victims are all females (i.e., males are not included in rape victim statistics), emphasizing the value of rape awareness among girls and young women. Youth 18 to 24 years old were over twice as likely to be a victim of assault (25%) or homicide (27%) and three times as likely to be a robbery victim (32%) in comparison to their representation in the population (11%). In contrast, older individuals (40 and over) were underrepresented in all of the four crime groups, with the highest proportion being victims of homicide (35%) (Table 2).

Figure 2
Youth and Young Adults at Greatest Risk of Victimization of a Violent Crime



NOTE: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

SOURCES: Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS) 2009 and SANDAG 2010 Statistics

Table 2
Type of Violent Victimization Varies by Age

	Rape	Robbery	Assault	Homicide
17 and under	28%	16%	10%	7%
18 to 24	32%	32%	25%	27%
25 to 39	25%	27%	35%	32%
40 and older	14%	24%	29%	35%

NOTE: Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

SOURCES: Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS) 2009, SANDAG 2010 Statistics and San Diego County Sheriff and Cities law enforcement agencies 2010.

Gender

In 2009 half (50%) of the region's population were male and half (50%) were female.

Nationally, the greatest disparity between violent crimes committed against males and females were those committed by intimate partners, which accounted for 3% of violent crimes against males and 23% against females.

NCVS 2009

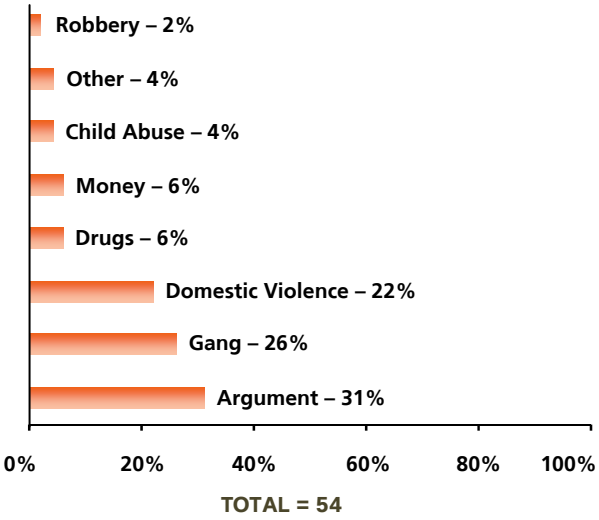
Overall, there was no difference between this proportion and the percent who were violent crime victims (51% female and 49% male) (not shown). However, this statistic is deceiving because there was variation between gender and the types of crime of which males and females were more likely to be victims. Specifically, males were overrepresented as victims of homicide (75%) and robbery (66%) in comparison to their representation in the population. Assault was the only crime where both females and males had similar representation (53% of females and 47% of males) (Table 3, page 10) and females represented all of the 745 rapes in the county (not shown).

WHAT WERE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HOMICIDE VICTIMS IN 2009?

Because of both the tragedy associated with the loss of a human life and the fact that homicide is one of the most reliable measures of violent crimes,[3] more detailed information is provided on the 75 individuals who died as a result of criminal homicide in 2009. In 2009 crime rates reflected a 25-year low in San Diego County, which included a 17 percent decrease in homicides from 2008 (not shown). Understanding the precipitating event (i.e., motive) contributing to the homicide sheds light on where to target prevention and enforcement efforts. Motivation data for 2009 were obtained directly from each of the jurisdictions, rather than from the California Department of Justice in an effort to obtain the most complete data.

Of the 75 homicides that occurred in 2009, motivation could be determined for 54 cases (72%). Almost one-third (31%) of these homicides were attributed to an argument, 26 percent to gang activity, 22 percent to domestic violence, 6 percent each to drugs or money issues, 4 percent each to other motives[4] or child abuse (3 month and 2 year old victims), and 2 percent to robbery (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Arguments Lead the List of Motives for Homicide in 2009



NOTE: Percentages do not equal 100 due to rounding.

SOURCES: San Diego County Sheriff and Cities law enforcement agencies 2010

[3] Fox, A., & Zawitz, M. (2007). **Homicide Trends in the United States.** Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Available at http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs.

[4] The "other" category includes other homicide precipitating events such as a murder/suicide between an elderly couple, and a shooting of an employer by a disgruntled employee.

Additional analysis of those homicides with a known motive revealed that females (50%) were more likely to be murdered as a result of a domestic violence incidence, whereas an argument (38%) or gang activity (30%) was the precipitating event for most male homicides (not shown).

Nationwide, firearms were involved in almost three-quarters (73%) of homicides.
(Expanded Homicide Data-Crime in the United States 2007)

Locally firearms were the most frequently used weapon in all of 2009 homicides. Specifically, homicides in San Diego County involved the following weapons:

- Firearms were used in over half (54%) of all homicides;
- Over one-quarter (28%) of homicides involved a knife or other sharp object;
- About one in ten homicides (9%) involved a personal weapon (e.g., hands, feet); and
- A blunt object or strangulation accounted for the remaining homicides (7%) (not shown).

Over the years, homicide motives have varied; but because of the change in the data collection process that occurred in 2008,[5] as well as the number of "unknown" motives, it is difficult to compare across years. However, it is worth noting that this is the second year in a row with a decrease in the proportion of homicides (with a known motive) that were attributed to gang activity (40% in 2007 and 31% in 2008 compared to only 26% in 2009) (not shown). Anecdotal information from law enforcement across the region attributed this reduction in part to intelligent-led gang reduction projects (See Box 1 for more information).

[5] Due to changes in the 2007 California Department of Justice reporting system, a significant number of motives were unknown and more complete data were available locally. As such, homicide data for this report are now collected from the local jurisdictions.

BOX 1
SAN DIEGO COUNTY'S 2009 GANG REDUCTION ACTIVITIES AT A GLANCE

Across the region law enforcement has implemented intelligence-led operations to reduce gang activities. Many of these specialized projects have involved multiple agencies and have been funded through federal grants. Some of these have included:

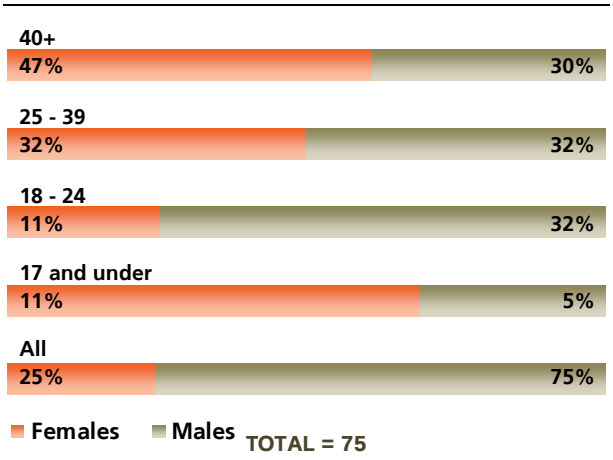
- **Sheriff-led, multiagency suppression operations targeting gangs in the North County and funded through a federal Byrne Grant;**
- **Targeted enforcement to reduce guns and gangs as part of the federal initiative Project Safe Neighborhoods;**
- **"Operation Stonegarden," funded by a Homeland Security grant, which aims to strengthen partnerships among local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to reduce border-related crime;**
- **Curfew sweeps in the City of San Diego and parts of East County targeting neighborhoods with high gang activity. Arrested youth and their family are offered services and support by local community and faith-based organizations;**
- **Multiagency task forces in the East, Central, and North regions that are sharing gang-related intelligence and collaborating on operations; and**
- **California Gang Reduction, Intervention, and Prevention (CalGRIP) programs supporting partnerships between law enforcement and community agencies to reduce gangs and gang violence throughout the region.**

Age and Gender

Closer examination of all homicide victims in 2009 provides more insight about the characteristics of victims. Overall in 2009, three-quarters (75%) of victims were male and unlike other violent crimes, individuals 40 and older represented the highest proportion of homicide victims (35%) (Table 2). However, examination of gender and age showed that younger males and older females were more likely to be homicide victims in 2009. Specifically, nearly half (47%) of all female homicide victims were aged 40 or older and 32 percent were between 25 and 39 years old. However, except for males 17 years old and younger, which accounted for five percent of male victims, around one-third of adult males in each of the age categories were victims. That is, 32 percent each of 18 to 24 year olds and 25 to 39 year olds, and 30 percent of males 40 and older were homicide victims. (Figure 4).

In 2009, female homicide victims were more likely to be older and victims of a result of a domestic violence incident. Male homicide victims were younger and more likely involved in an argument or gang-related incident.
(2009 San Diego Region Homicide Data)

Figure 4
Most of Female Homicide Victims Were Over 40 Years Old



SOURCES: SANDAG 2010 Statistics and San Diego County Sheriff and Cities law enforcement agencies 2010.

Age and Ethnicity

In addition to age and gender, there was a difference in homicide victims' ethnicity in comparison to their representation in the population in 2009. Specifically, while Blacks comprised five percent of the population they accounted for 19 percent of homicide victims, whereas Whites comprised 39 percent of victims but represented 50 percent of the population. Furthermore, less than one in ten (8%) individuals of other ethnicities (15% of population) and just over one-third (35%) of Hispanics (30% of population) were homicide victims (Table 3).

Young adult Blacks and Hispanics were overrepresented among 2009 homicide victims.
(2009 San Diego Region Homicide Data)

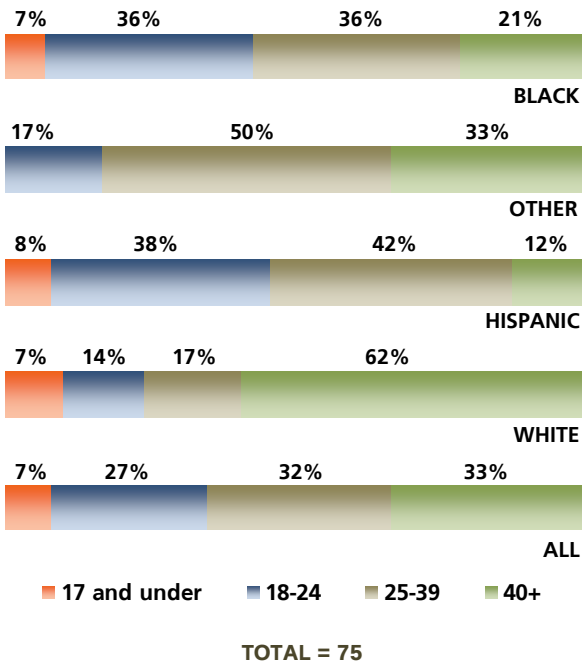
The proportions also varied when examining both the ethnicity and age of the victim, most notably among Whites, Hispanics, and Blacks. Whites ages 40 and over (62%) were overrepresented, whereas the majority of Hispanic (88%) and Black (79%) victims were under 40 years old. (Figure 5).

> *Murder victims for whom race was known, 50.1 percent were Black, 47.6 percent were White, and the remaining victims were from other or unknown races.*
>
> **(Expanded Homicide Data – Crime in the United States 2007)**

Analysis of motive and race shed some light on these differences:

- Over half (56%) of Black homicide victims for which motive was known involved a gang-related incident;
- An argument was the most frequently noted precipitating event for homicides in which Hispanics were victims (45%);
- An equal proportion of White victims had an argument (33%) or domestic violence incident (33%) as their precipitating event; and
- Half (50%) of the individuals of "other" ethnicities were victims of a domestic violence homicide (not shown).

Figure 5
Homicide Victims
Vary by Age and Ethnicity



SOURCES: SANDAG 2010 Statistics and San Diego County Sheriff and Cities law enforcement agencies 2010.

WHAT WERE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF VICTIMS AND SUSPECTS FOR EACH OF THE CRIME TYPES?

Unlike victim data, which is based on crime incident reports, suspect information is gathered from arrest data. Thus, the suspect information could be from a crime committed in a previous year. In addition, as with victimization, the pattern of suspect characteristics (i.e., ethnicity, age, and gender) typically varies across crime type. These data, along with all victimization characteristics, are provided in more detail in Table 3. Some noticeable differences include:

- Youth under 17 years old accounted for about one in ten (11%) rape suspects and about one-quarter (26%) of robbery suspects.
- Females represented over half (53%) of assault victims, but only 26 percent of assault suspects.
- Females represented over one-half (51%) of violent crime victims but less than one-quarter (24%) of violent crime suspects (not shown).
- Over one in four (28%) female rape victims were under the age of 18.
- Males represented about one-half (49%) of all violent crime victims but over three-quarters (76%) of violent crime suspects (not shown).

Table 3
Violent Crime Victim and Suspect Characteristics 2009

	HOMICIDE		RAPE		ROBBERY		ASSAULT	
	Victims	Suspects	Victims	Suspects	Victims	Suspects	Victims	Suspects
Black	19%	23%	11%	22%	10%	31%	15%	19%
Hispanic	35%	32%	31%	44%	39%	38%	33%	35%
White	39%	33%	52%	24%	39%	25%	44%	39%
Other	8%	12%	6%	9%	12%	6%	8%	8%
≤17	7%	5%	28%	11%	16%	26%	10%	11%
18 to 24	27%	35%	32%	20%	32%	41%	25%	24%
25 to 39	32%	37%	25%	38%	27%	23%	35%	39%
40+	35%	23%	14%	31%	24%	10%	29%	26%
Male	75%	93%	NA	NA	66%	85%	47%	74%
Female	25%	7%	NA	NA	34%	15%	53%	26%

SOURCES: SANDAG 2010 Statistics and San Diego County Sheriff and Cities law enforcement agencies 2010.

SUMMARY

Understanding who is at greatest risk for being a victim of violent crime provides a fuller picture of how crime impacts the San Diego region. As with the nation, San Diego County is experiencing some of its lowest crime rates in decades. Best practices in the field today require that efforts to reduce crime involve a multifaceted approach, including a strong prevention component, evidence-based interventions, and intelligence-led enforcement. San Diego's many efforts to address gangs are examples of this multifaceted approach. This report highlights some of the extensive efforts local jurisdictions and community partners have made to reduce gang membership and gang related crime. The San Diego region has been successful in leveraging additional state and federal funds to support coordinated gang-reduction efforts. Specifically, law enforcement throughout the region is actively partnering with communities, schools, researchers, and non-profit agencies to employ a comprehensive model to address gang problems. Reductions in gang-related crime, including homicides, have been noted by local law enforcement as reflective of these efforts.

Overall, the data regarding 2009 violent crime victims and suspects in San Diego County indicate similar trends as in previous years, with young adult males, especially Black males, at greatest risk for victimization. Blacks were overrepresented in every violent crime category in comparison to their proportion in the population. In addition to race/ethnicity, age also was a predictor of victimization, with the risk of being a victim of a violent crime decreasing with age. The exception is among homicide victims, in which Whites age 40 and older were overrepresented in comparison to victims of other ages and ethnicities.

A closer analysis of homicides echoed national statistics with females more likely to be murdered as a result of a domestic violence incident and males more often a victim of an argument or gang-related incident. Overall, arguments accounted for the largest proportion of homicides in 2009, followed by gang activity and domestic violence.

Suspect data also highlighted the need for continued early interventions as young individuals (under 18 years old) were found to be committing serious violent crimes, such as robbery and rape.

METHODOLOGY

The numbers presented in this report were provided by the Automated Regional Justice Information System (ARJIS) and derived from the Crime Analysis Statistical System (CASS). A few qualifying statements should be considered when interpreting this information.

- Information regarding crime victim characteristics was available from incident reports that were completed when a crime was reported to law enforcement. It should be noted that not all crimes are reported to law enforcement and that some sectors of the population may be more likely to report crime than others.[6]
- Information regarding crime suspect characteristics was available from arrest reports. Obviously, descriptives from individuals who committed a crime but were not arrested are not included; and it is possible that some individuals in the suspect sample did not commit the crime for which they were arrested.

[6] The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs.

- Because of changes in the California Department of Justice's reporting system, data on homicide motives was gathered from local jurisdictions. Unlike past years, gathering the data locally may have allowed for more accurate and complete motive information and therefore, comparisons across time were not feasible.
- The number of victims reported in this bulletin varies from the number of crimes reported in other publications because of missing information for some crimes, the inclusion of simple assault, and the inclusion of some crimes later determined to be unfounded.
- With the exception of homicide, for a victim's or suspect's information to be included in these statistics, all three variables (ethnicity, age/date of birth and gender) had to have valid information entered into the ARJIS database.