

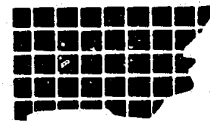
# OFFICE OF JUSTICE SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

DRUGS AND HOMICIDE IN NEW YORK STATE

August, 1988

131364

DIVISION OF  
**CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE  
SERVICES**



**NEW YORK  
STATE**



**DRUGS AND HOMICIDE IN NEW YORK STATE<sup>1</sup>**

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August, 1988

131/364

U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice

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## **DRUGS AND HOMICIDE IN NEW YORK STATE**

In 1985, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services and Narcotic and Drug Research, Inc. began a joint study of the relationship between drugs and violent crime. The primary purpose of this research is to study and develop ways of collecting data about the drug relatedness of homicide and other violent crime so as to better understand the drugs and violence nexus. Homicide was selected as a starting point for two reasons. In the universe of violent crime, homicide is a relatively infrequent occurrence; for 1984 in New York State, UCR reported 1,777 homicides as compared to 89,917 robberies and 64,917 aggravated assaults. Also, compared to other violent crimes homicide has a relatively high clearance rate; in 1984, UCR reported that 68.3 percent of New York State's homicides were cleared by arrest, as compared to 23.9 percent of robberies and 60.4 percent of aggravated assaults.

### **Establishing an Adequate Definition**

The research addresses two issues: 1) the need for new data collection given the lack of any routine and systematic process for the collection of data about the drug relatedness of violent crime, particularly homicide, and 2) the absence of any consensus (within local jurisdictions or on the national level) about how to define drug relatedness. Without such agreement about meaning, realistic comparisons within or between jurisdictions or over time are not possible.

Toward the development of a uniform and policy-relevant

definition of drug-related homicide, a **tripartite explanatory framework** structures the study. This conceptualization permits and encourages a broad definition that recognizes that homicide is not a homogeneous phenomenon. Each aspect of the framework identifies a type or dimension of drug-related homicide as follows:

- o A homicide is considered **psychopharmacological** when it results from short or long-term ingestion of specific substances by the victim, the perpetrator, or both. For example, after meeting in a bar, spending the night drinking heavily and smoking pot together, two young men, strangers just the day before, become involved in a dispute. One thinks the other stole his money when he fell asleep. In a pick-up truck, a fight begins. In the end, one young man is dead, having been stabbed repeatedly by his newfound drinking partner.

- o A homicide is considered **economic compulsive** when it is motivated by an individual's compulsive need to support a costly drug habit. A young man, known by the police to be a user of drugs and alcohol, kills an older man with a blunt instrument during a robbery. The police believe that at the time the young man was sick, in need of drugs.

- o A homicide is considered **systemic** when it results from the aggressive patterns of interaction traditionally associated with any system of drug distribution and use. Two young men meet in the parking lot of a country club, a place known by the police to be a drug sales location. Neither is believed to be a user of drugs, but one is considered to be a high level dealer, the other a low level dealer. They meet for a drug-related transaction. In what the police call a fight between rival dealers over territory, the high level dealer is stabbed and killed. Cocaine is found at the scene.

- o While some homicide cases are classifiable in terms of one or another dimensions of the tripartite framework, other cases are too complex and need to be considered **multidimensional**. For example, a young woman and her longtime live-in lover, an older man, are drinking together, heavily enough for both to be considered high and irrational. She asks him for money and he refuses. Both are opiate users, and he believes she wants the money to buy drugs. He doesn't want her to get "shot up." During the dispute that follows, she stabs and kills him with a butcher knife.

### The Extent of Drug Relatedness

For the first phase of the study, data were collected during 1986 from police records of all homicides committed in New York State in 1984. This retrospective approach demonstrated that police departments in 1984 did not record or maintain information about the drug relatedness of homicide cases unless that information was directly pertinent to their case investigation. Despite this limitation, the data do provide estimates of the extent of drug-related homicide for New York City and for the remainder of the State.

Of the 1,459 homicides committed in New York City in 1984, about 25 percent were identified as drug-related; of 309 homicides committed elsewhere in the State that year, over 40 percent were identified as drug-related. (The difference reflects the fact that the New York City data set did not include information about alcohol, and the non-New York City data set did.) However, for the remaining cases, about 13 percent of those in New York City and 18 percent of those from the rest of the State lacked sufficient information to identify them as either drug-related or not. (See Table 1, below.)

Table 1

#### HOMICIDES IN NEW YORK STATE, 1984 BY DRUG RELATEDNESS<sup>2</sup>

	<u>New York City</u> (N = 1,459)		<u>Non-New York City</u> (N = 309)	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Drug-Related	347	23.8%	129	41.8%
Not Drug-Related	916	62.8%	123	39.8%
Unknown	196	13.4%	57	18.5%

### **Characteristics of the Drug-Related Homicides**

Homicide is a complex phenomenon, and drug-related homicides reflect this complexity.. Nonetheless, the data for the 1984 New York State homicides do permit characterization of those cases that were drug-related, both for New York City and for the remainder of the State.<sup>3</sup>

**New York City.** Of the 1,459 homicides committed in New York City in 1984, 347 (23.8%) were clearly identifiable as drug-related. There were 347 victims and 403 perpetrators involved in these cases. (See Table 2.)

Some of the drug-related homicides were related as well to other crimes, such as robbery (11.2%), but most were disputes (44.4% premeditated and 23.1% spontaneous). Almost all of the killings (80.4%) were committed with a handgun. Most often, victims were killed in an open area (41.5%) or a residence (40.6%), either of which was likely to have been a drug location (66.6%), usually for the sale of drugs (58.8% of all cases). For these homicides, the victim was likely to have been a friend or acquaintance of the perpetrator (79.4%).

Victims of drug-related homicide in New York City in 1984 tended to be in their twenties (47.8%), male (89.6%), and black (42.1%) or hispanic (49.0%). Most victims were believed by the police to have been drug traffickers (71.8%). Occasionally, drugs (23.1%) or drug paraphernalia (21.6%) were found at the scene of the homicide.

The perpetrators of the homicides committed in New York City in 1984 tended to be in their twenties (30.7%) or thirties

(27.9%), male (72.0%), and black (36.5%) or hispanic (29.5%). About half of the perpetrators (50.1%) were believed to have been drug traffickers, slightly less than half (40.2%) drug users.

**Table 2**

**SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF DRUG-RELATED CASES,  
NEW YORK CITY, 1984  
(347 Cases and Victims, 403 Perpetrators<sup>4</sup>)**

	<u>Percent</u>
Related to robbery.....	11.2%
Premeditated dispute.....	44.4
Spontaneous dispute.....	23.1
Committed with a handgun.....	80.4
Victim killed in an open area.....	41.5
Victim killed in a residence.....	40.6
Killing site was a drug location.....	66.6
Killing site was a drug sales location.....	58.8
Victim was a friend or acquaintance of perp....	79.4
Victim's age was in twenties.....	47.8
Victim was male.....	89.6
Victim was black.....	42.1
Victim was hispanic.....	49.0
Victim believed to have been drug trafficker...	71.8
Drugs found at the scene.....	23.1
Drug paraphernalia found at the scene.....	21.6
Perpetrator's age was in twenties.....	30.7
Perpetrator's age was in thirties.....	27.9
Perpetrator was male.....	72.0
Perpetrator was black.....	36.5
Perpetrator was hispanic.....	29.5
Perp. believed to have been drug trafficker....	50.1
Perpetrator believed to have been drug user....	40.2

**Non-New York City.** Of the 309 homicides committed outside of New York City but within New York State in 1984, 129 (41.7%) were identifiable as drug-related. Associated with these drug-related homicides were 129 victims and 155 perpetrators. (See Table 3.)

As was the case in New York City, homicides committed throughout the remainder of the State were likely to have been the result of a dispute (52.7%), though another crime may have

also been involved (e.g., robbery, 11.6%). The most common means used for the killing was some sort of gun (40.3%), though a knife or cutting instrument was used more frequently (30.2% of all cases ) than any one type of gun. Almost half of the killings (49.6%) took place in a residence, but these residences were not as likely as those in New York City to have been classified by the police as a drug location; of all sites, about one of seven (14.7%) were believed to have been used for the sale of drugs. Very often (40.6%), the victim of the killing was a friend, acquaintance, or neighbor of the perpetrator.

Statewide, victims of these homicides tended to be in their twenties (28.7%) or thirties (24.8%), male (77.5%), and more often white (49.6%) than black (36.4%). About one-third (30.2%) of the victims were believed by the police to have been drug traffickers. A substantial number were believed to have been alcoholics (27.9%) or users of non-opiate drugs (32.6%); a smaller proportion (13.2%) were believed to have been opiate drug users. While many of the victims were believed by the police to have been high on alcohol (44.2%) at the time of their killing, only a few (14.0%) were believed to have been high on drugs and none sick in need of drugs.

Perpetrators of these homicides in 1984 tended to be in their twenties (39.3%) or younger (16.1%), male (77.4%), and to be white (51.0%) rather than black (28.4%) or hispanic (8.4%). Almost one-third of the perpetrators (29.7%) were believed by the police to have been drug traffickers. At the time of the killing, more than half (54.2%) were believed to have been high on alcohol, but only about one-quarter (25.2%) were believed to



have been high on drugs. For these cases, perpetrators and victims who did use drugs at the time of the homicide were likely to have used similar substances: alcohol (51.2% of victims, 60.6% of perpetrators); marijuana (14.0% of victims, 22.6% of perpetrators); or cocaine (9.3% of victims, 9.7% of perpetrators).

**Table 3**

**SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF DRUG-RELATED CASES,  
NON-NEW YORK CITY, 1984  
(129 Cases and Victims, 155 Perpetrators<sup>4</sup>)**

	<u>Percent</u>
Related to robbery.....	11.6%
Dispute.....	52.7
Committed with a gun.....	40.3
Committed with a knife.....	30.2
Victim killed in a residence.....	49.6
Killing site was a drug sales location.....	14.7
Victim was a friend or acquaintance of perp....	40.6
Victim's age was in twenties.....	28.7
Victim's age was in thirties.....	24.8
Victim was male.....	77.5
Victim was white.....	49.6
Victim was black.....	36.4
Victim believed to have been drug trafficker...	30.2
Victim believed to have been alcoholic.....	27.9
Victim believed to have been opiate user.....	13.2
Victim believed to have been other drug user...	32.6
Victim believed to have been high on alcohol...	44.2
Victim believed to have been high on drugs.....	14.0
Victim believed to have been using alcohol.....	51.2
Victim believed to have been using marijuana...	14.0
Victim believed to have been using cocaine.....	09.3
Victim believed to have been sick in need.....	00.0
Perpetrator's age was in twenties.....	39.3
Perpetrator's age was younger than twenties....	16.1
Perpetrator was male.....	77.4
Perpetrator was white.....	51.0
Perpetrator was black.....	28.4
Perpetrator was hispanic.....	08.4
Perp. believed to have been drug trafficker....	29.7
Perp. believed to have been high on alcohol....	54.2
Perp. believed to have been high on drugs.....	25.2
Perp. believed to have been using alcohol.....	60.6
Perp. believed to have been using marijuana....	22.6
Perp. believed to have been using cocaine.....	09.7

### The Tripartite Frameworks

Besides offering an estimate of the extent and characteristics of drug-related homicide in New York State in 1984, the data from the non-New York City cases provided empirical support for a definition of drug relatedness based on the tripartite conceptualization of drug-related homicide. (For the New York City cases, there was insufficient information to classify cases by the framework.)

Of the 129 non-New York City cases identified as drug-related, 76 (58.9%) were classified as psychopharmacological; four cases (3.1%) as economic compulsive; 27 (20.9%) as systemic; 18 (14.0%) as multidimensional; and only four (3.1%) as drug-related in some other way. (See Table 4.)

Table 4

#### TRIPARTITE EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORK Non-New York City Cases

Primary Categorization	Number	Percent	
		All Cases (N=309)	Drug-Related Cases (N=129)
Psychopharmacological	76	24.6%	58.9%
Economic Compulsive	4	1.3	3.1
Systemic	27	8.7	20.9
Multidimensional	18	5.8	14.0
Other Drug-Related	4	1.3	3.1
Not Drug-Related	123	39.8	---
Cannot Be Determined	57	18.4	---

Despite the predominance of psychopharmacological cases among the 1984 homicides, there is reason to believe that the

drug-related homicides included in the study are more systemic in nature than the straightforward analysis suggests. This conclusion has been conveyed by local law enforcement officials. It is also supported by analysis of the homicide case data in terms of a **tripartite reporting framework**, one that classifies cases by the type of evidence on which a determination of drug relatedness is made.

Using this framework, cases may be categorized as drug-related because: 1) police found evidence of drug consumption by the victim or perpetrator or both at or close to the time of the killing; 2) contraband or drugs were found at the scene; or 3) the victim or perpetrator or both were known by the police to have been involved in drug use or trafficking.

**Table 5**

**TRIPARTITE REPORTING FRAMEWORK  
Non-New York City Cases**

	Drug-Related (N=129)	Not Drug-Related (N=123)	Unknown (N=57)
Evidence of Drug Consumption	89.1%	21.1%	73.7%
Contraband or Drugs at Scene	38.0	5.7	17.5
Known Drug Involvement	87.6	19.5	68.4
None of the Above	0.0	66.7	10.5

Table 5, above, shows that even among cases that are not classified as drug-related, about 21 percent included some evidence of victim or perpetrator drug consumption prior to the

killing. Given the widespread use of drugs among criminal offenders now being documented by studies involving urine testing of arrestees, this finding is not surprising. What is surprising, and what supports the argument that more of the homicides had a systemic dimension than the direct analysis indicates, is that almost 20 percent of the not drug-related cases involved victims or perpetrators who had some known drug involvement. (The "known drug involvement" variable is a composite of other variables including whether the circumstance was drug-related, whether the killing took place at a drug location, whether the victim or perpetrator was a known trafficker or user of drugs, whether the event involved drug buying or selling, and whether the victim/perpetrator relationship was drug-related.)

### **Conclusion**

Through this research, we have begun to develop, test, and modify for further testing a form and procedure for the collection of detailed information about the drug relatedness of homicide cases.

Initially, data were collected during 1985-86 from records of all homicides committed in New York State in 1984. This **retrospective** approach demonstrated that police departments in 1984 did not record or maintain information about the drug relatedness of homicide cases unless that information was directly pertinent to their case investigation.

Beginning March 1, 1988 and for eight months following, information about the drug relatedness of homicide cases in

selected areas of New York City is being recorded during active case investigation. This **prospective** approach will permit the collection of drug relatedness data even when information about drugs does not appear to be directly related to case investigation, and should provide the best estimate yet of the extent and nature of drug-related homicide in a given jurisdiction.

The prospective data collection effort offers access to detail about homicide cases previously unavailable. For example, data are being collected about the types of drugs used by homicide perpetrators and victims and about the specific role of drugs in the homicide event. With this data, it will be possible to better understand how drugs and homicide are related.

From the analyses of the New York State homicide case data, we are contributing to the establishment of a realistic, measureable, and policy-relevant definition of drug-related homicide, and thereby contributing to a greater ability to allocate targeted criminal justice resources in an equitable and effective manner. From this research, we also hope to be able to develop a system and procedure for collecting data about the drug relatedness of homicides that can be used by local criminal justice agencies in their own recordkeeping and policymaking.

## NOTES

1. Special thanks to Bernard A. Gropper of the National Institute of Justice for all the support he has given to this project. Thanks also to Barry C. Sample, Bruce C. Frederick, and Patrick Ryan for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. This report has been prepared with support by grants numbered 85-IJ-CX-0052 and 87-IJ-CX-0046 from the National Institute of Justice. Additional support was made available from the New York State Divisions of Criminal Justice Services and Substance Abuse Services and from Narcotic and Drug Research, Inc. However, opinions and points of view expressed herein do not necessarily reflect or represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Government, the State of New York or any of its divisions, nor of Narcotic and Drug Research, Inc. and no official endorsement should be inferred.

2. Of the cases for which a determination about drug relatedness could be made, in New York City ( $N = 1,263$ ), 27.5 percent were drug-related and for the remainder of the State ( $N = 252$ ), 51.2 percent were drug-related.

3. The findings from the 1984 New York State homicide data should be viewed with caution. As noted, the data were collected one or two years after the event, and they were collected from records maintained for investigative rather than research purposes. In addition, the New York City data are not directly comparable to the non-New York City data.

4. For both New York City and non-New York City cases, the percentages for perpetrators are underestimates, since the number of perpetrators used to calculate percentages for both areas includes at least one perpetrator for each case, even if none is known.