



JULY 2013, VOLUME 3, NUMBER 6

## IN THIS ISSUE

**The Science of Victimization**

**The Homicide Review Process**

**Announcements & Upcoming Events**

- Training opportunities
- Funding opportunities

**News & Views**

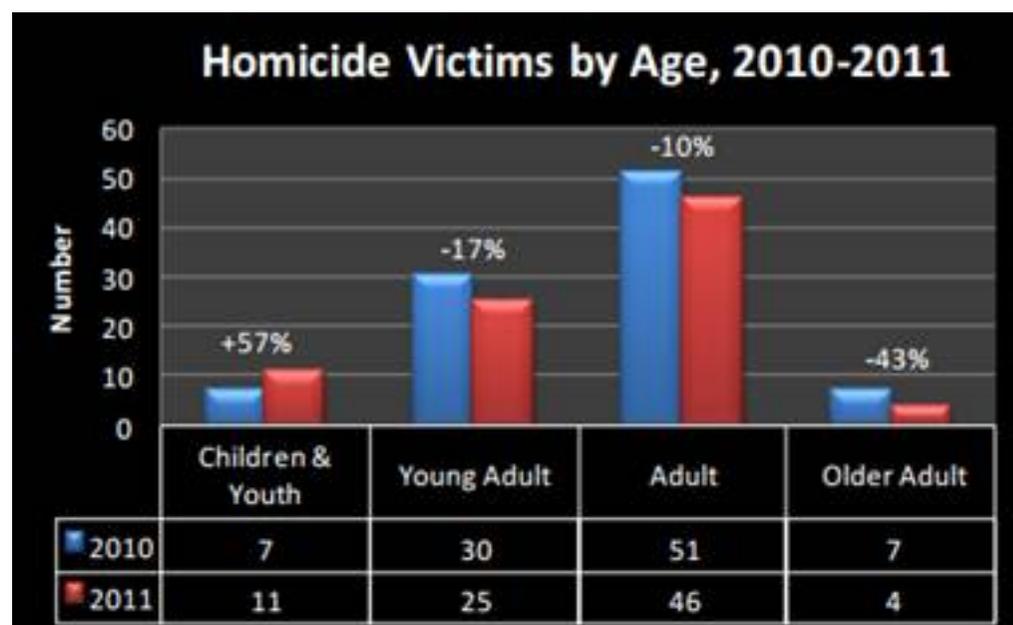
- Reports
- News
- Other resources

## THE HOMICIDE REVIEW PROCESS

## THE SCIENCE OF VICTIMIZATION

When a sexual assault victim goes to the police, a chain of events is set in motion. There's the requisite medical exam and collection of forensic evidence. Then a formal report begins. None of this brings closure or consolation to the victim, as recounting the details of a traumatic incident can be nearly as horrifying and humiliating as the crime itself. When victims come forward following a personal and legal violation, their brains and bodies are locked in a complex neurobiological and physiological process. From the moment an assault begins, the mind triggers a severe hormonal response, leading victims to fight, flight, or even freeze—a phenomenon known as tonic immobility or "rape-induced paralysis." A flood of hormones rushes to the brain's memory structures, making it difficult to recount the event in logical, successive detail. Memories are slow and fragmented—sometimes they don't agree or make sense. Despite the time and effort it may take to tell the story, however, research shows only a very small percentage of reports are fabricated, and in fact, the memory and recall are accurate.

A large part of law enforcement remains unaware



*2011 Homicides and Nonfatal Shootings Report,  
Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission*

Everyone in the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention is concerned about violence of all kinds, from bullying and simple assault to domestic and sexual violence. But one crime most threatens our urban environments and frames our cities as dangerous places to live: homicide. The rise and fall of cities' murder rates cause inevitable hyperbole in the media and public. Although the impact is devastating to those immediately affected, it can also reverberate throughout the community, creating damaging effects on the local economy, sense of kinship, and city reputation.

To turn homicide rates around in Wisconsin's largest city, Milwaukee established the Homicide Review Commission in 2005. Six years earlier, Milwaukee saw its homicide rate rise. By 2001, it was listed as one of the top 10 most dangerous U.S. cities. Then-Mayor Tom Barrett, the Milwaukee Police Department, and Milwaukee County District Attorney tasked a working group of criminal justice and public health decision makers with finding ways to address the problem. The working group developed a "unique strategy for reviewing homicide cases using problem-solving approaches that [sought] not only to solve homicides but also provide opportunities for prevention," said Senior Social Science Analyst John Markovic of the U.S. Department of Justice COPS Office.

of the neurobiology of trauma—one reason for high levels of attrition in sexual assault cases. When Rebecca Campbell, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology at Michigan State University, analyzed 12 years of data across six jurisdictions, she found 86 percent of reported sexual assaults never made it beyond the police interview room. Victims and law enforcement agree that in 69 percent of cases reviewed, victims were discouraged from proceeding. In about 51 percent of cases, law enforcement advised victims that the crime perpetrated against them was not serious enough to pursue. Seventy percent of cases showed law enforcement questioned victims about their dress or behavior, implying they may have provoked the assault. On average, 90 percent of victims experienced at least one secondary victimization behavior during their first report.

"Most officers who have completed standard training come into a sexual assault interview or report incredibly skeptical about victims," said Dr. Campbell. "They've been trained [to believe] that many sex assaults are false and begin their investigation from that point of view—they treat victims like they're suspects. When you interview [within] the first 72 hours, the stories might have a lot of inconsistency, but every one of those stories could be explained by the neurobiology of trauma. Things come back in bits and pieces and there's clear scientific evidence why victims behave that way. What law enforcement is seeing is evidence of trauma."

When interviewing a victim, many officers use the Reid technique, an interview strategy that combines investigative and behavior-provoking questions to assess the subject's credibility. The Reid method was specifically designed to hone in on behavioral cues and patterns in body language to reveal inconsistencies and determine faults in a victim's story. Rather than making victims feel comfortable and safe, the process heightens their stress, exacerbating the trauma and often leading them to drop the report entirely.

"It's secondary victimization," said Dr. Campbell. "Victims withdraw as a self-protective mechanism, walking away from the criminal justice system."

Although studies haven't focused extensively on how damaging such physiological responses can be for young people, there is solid research on adults who have experienced sexual assault as children and adolescents. Adolescents are at high risk for sexual assault, and sexually assaulted children have an increased risk of being victimized again later in life. Long-term structural changes occur in the brain, said Dr. Campbell at a [National Institute of Justice Research for the Real World Seminar](#). "So structurally we know that the developing brain is adversely impacted

Mallory O'Brien was a founding member of the Commission and serves as its director. With her background in violent injury prevention and experience applying public health approaches to solve problems, she was a natural fit for the job. According to O'Brien, the goal was to get "real-time information on homicides." Paper reports took too long and the information they contained was not as focused or comprehensive as it needed to be for an accurate depiction of city violence. The Commission was looking for specifics: event location, the identity of the victim, the weapon used, and what constituted the victim's environment. Since most homicide victims were known by law enforcement, engaged in risky behavior, or lived in high-risk environments, the Commission wanted background information. For example, did this person have an unprosecuted criminal case that may have provided an opportunity for effective intervention? To begin the prevention planning process they needed as much data as possible.

The Commission began their work in three police districts. By starting small, they were able to use other districts as control groups to measure the impact of their efforts. In a recently published [evaluation](#) by Harvard University, the Commission achieved a 52 percent reduction in homicides. Since then, they have increased the scope of their efforts. They started out assessing domestic violence homicides, then they expanded their work to include domestic violence involving strangulation, where the assault that followed had a high likelihood of murder. Recently, they began looking specifically at juvenile homicides.

With the public health model as a guiding principle, the Commission created subcommittees to look at prevention. The subcommittees comprise four groups: one on reentry, one focused on fatherhood, one that studies licensing premises where alcohol is served, and one centered on gun violence reduction.

The Milwaukee Homicide Review Commission is not standing pat. They continue to translate data and knowledge into violence reduction efforts. Their subcommittees are evidence that the city is following through with one of its most important tenets, which according to O'Brien is "making sure the right people are in the room." As with the Forum members, they are turning to prevention as the best answer to violence, and hope to reach the tipping point where urban environments finally become safe. Only then will cities be in a position to break self-sustaining patterns of violence.

New Orleans initiated the Mayor's Strategic Command to Reduce Murders based on the Milwaukee Homicide Review model. The effort is closely linked to Mayor Mitch Landrieu's NOLA for Life murder reduction strategy, which has been helpful in gaining involvement from key agencies and individuals in the city. Chris Gunther, Forum site coordinator in New Orleans, says the program is in line with their effort to take up strategic planning using a public health approach.

David Seal, Ph.D., of the Tulane University School of Public Health, is Director of Research for the Strategic Command (see his [fall 2012 presentation](#) to the Forum listening team). Dr. Seal shared that, much like Milwaukee, New Orleans' homicide-reduction effort relies on the work of three Action Teams that report to the Executive Action Team under Mayor Landrieu's leadership. They are the Rapid Engagement of Support in the Event of Trauma, which deals with community outreach following

by these traumas, and it does appear to, at the cellular level—structural level—be permanent."

"The other issue is that the brain is a remarkably plastic thing," said Dr. Campbell. "So [for] a child or adolescent who experiences these crimes and then gets a good response ... the capacity to heal from that—structurally, functionally—I think is very good, but the research is not yet there."

The ultimate goal of lowering sexual assault case attrition will require much training and retraining—for first responders, police officers, nurses, medical examiners, and detectives. Dr. Campbell has found that law enforcement is responding positively to the education. "What I'm seeing nationally is that there's training on sexual assault for law enforcement and they're going for it in large numbers," she said.

Dr. Campbell starts with the basics: diagrams of what happens to the brain when trying to recall a traumatic event. She walks officers through the process, showing them the science behind it. "They recognize the symptoms," she said. "Instead of thinking [the symptoms are] indicative of lying, they realize they're indicative of trauma."

In Detroit, where a number of sexual assault kits remain untested, Dr. Campbell is training practitioners. She also trains city-area advocates and medical staff, with the goal to facilitate widespread understanding of victims' behavior.

Having done extensive research and training on the science of trauma, Dr. Campbell knows it's really just a matter of practice. "When law enforcement uses these basic principles and sees how well it works, [the science] sells itself."

## ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPCOMING EVENTS

### Training Opportunities

At 2 p.m. on August 7, 2013, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's National Girls Institute will host the Webinar "[A Trauma Informed Effective Reinforcement System for Girls.](#)" Presentations will review this female-responsive, research-based model, which offers short-term detention and residential programs as alternatives to compliance-focused behavior management systems.

[Register and learn more.](#)

Applications are open for Georgetown

a murder; Community Action Team (service provider organizations); and Criminal Justice Action Team (law enforcement). The teams meet regularly to review data related to murders and nonfatal shootings and make recommendations to reduce shootings.

The Action Teams have generated more than 80 "action items"—about two thirds of which are in process. Homicide reduction is a top priority for Mayor Landrieu. It's also a crucial part of the violence-reduction effort in Forum cities Detroit and Chicago, which received federally sponsored training and technical assistance in the homicide review process.

Understanding the circumstances that lead to homicide in our cities gives us the power to bring about real and lasting change. Milwaukee, New Orleans, Detroit, and Chicago are using what they know to repair and improve the safety, health, and happiness of their citizens. It's testimony to an age-old adage: knowledge really is power.

## NEWS & VIEWS

### Reports

#### HHS/CDC Finds Youth Homicide Reached 30-Year Low in 2010

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 2013*

Murder rates among children, teens, and young adults hit a 30-year-low in 2010, according to a new [report](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. After a sharp rise in the late 80s and early 90s, homicide rates for 10- to 24-year-olds have fallen. But murder still ranks in the top three causes of death for young people. Primary prevention strategies—including those that engage high-risk youth—for schools, families, and neighborhoods—remain crucial.

#### Indicators of School Crime and Safety

*U.S. Department of Education, 2012*

Published by the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics and Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, this [report](#) examines crime on the way to and from school and at school, with data from the perspectives of students, teachers, and principals. In 2011, students ages 12–18 were victims of about 1,246,000 nonfatal victimizations at school, including 648,600 thefts and 597,500 violent incidents. Ten percent of male students in grades 9–12 reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property, compared with 5 percent of female students.

#### Progress Report on the President's Executive Actions to Reduce Gun Violence

*The White House, 2013*

The Obama Administration released a [progress report](#) on 21 of 23 executive actions proposed in January to reduce gun violence,

University's Center for Juvenile Justice [Information Sharing Certificate Program](#), December 9–12, 2013, in Washington, D.C. The program will help juvenile justice and other child-serving professionals increase their information-sharing knowledge, develop action plans for reform, and access technical assistance to overcome barriers when implementing reforms. [Apply](#) by September 6, 2013.

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is accepting applications for its School Pathways to the Juvenile Justice System Project. The Council will select up to 16 court jurisdictions seeking to reduce or eliminate the "school-to-prison pipeline." They will provide training and technical assistance to reduce referrals of youth to juvenile courts for school misbehavior, encourage positive school disciplinary practices, engage students, and keep youth in school. [Applications](#) are due September 15, 2013.

Global Youth Justice will host its [8th Training Institute](#) in Las Vegas, Nevada, December 3–5, 2013. Topics include training youth and adult volunteers, delivering quality community services and programs, conducting mock family intake meetings, juvenile referral sources, grant writing, and funding opportunities.

## Funding Opportunity

The Administration for Children and Families' Family and Youth Services Bureau is funding [Runaway and Homeless Youth Capacity Building for LGBTQ Youth Populations](#) to expand the capacity of transitional living programs serving homeless lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or questioning (LGBTQ) youth, and support knowledge development to address this population's needs. Applications are due by August 13, 2013.

including guides to develop high-quality emergency operations plans for K–12 schools, institutions of higher education, and houses of worship.

## State–Local Partnership in Ohio Cuts Juvenile Recidivism, Costs

*The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2013*

In 1994, RECLAIM Ohio initiated a performance-based funding partnership between the state and local governments that expanded counties' use of community-based alternatives to incarceration in overcrowded, expensive state facilities for lower-risk youth. The [program](#) has reduced recidivism rates and saved Ohio millions of dollars.

## Bending the Curve: Juvenile Corrections Reform in Texas

*The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2013*

Texas has repaired its juvenile corrections system over the past 6 years with a series of [reforms](#) that significantly reduced the number of youth in secure state facilities and increased public safety.

## News

### Boston Foundation Invests in Summer Youth Programs

The [Boston Foundation](#) is investing more than \$600,000 to fund summer programs in and around the city this year. Funds will provide critically needed jobs and opportunities for youth to build skills, retain learning, and gain employment during the summer months. The investment includes more than \$325,000 in grants for "My Summer in the City," a network of nearly 30 programs providing activities and summer jobs for Boston youth. An interactive, regularly updated calendar of My Summer in the City programs and events can be found on the [Boston Foundation Web site](#).

### Good News: Youth Employment Slows Violence. Bad News: Youth Unemployment Is Spiking

Researchers at Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies found that [low-income Boston teenagers with summer jobs are less likely to engage in violence and drug and alcohol use](#). However, the number of working young people has dropped rapidly over the past 10 years.

## Other Resources

The [2013 KIDS COUNT Data Book](#) provides state and national data on 16 indicators of child well-being across four domains: economics, education, health, and family and community. Children have continued to progress in the education and health domains, despite growing poverty rates.

## Contact Us

Send questions or feedback about the newsletter to [NFYVP@dsgonline.com](mailto:NFYVP@dsgonline.com) or [subscribe](#).

The *National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention Newsletter* is prepared under Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Cooperative Agreement No. 2012–MU–FX–K009 with Development Services Group, Inc.

The views, opinions, and content of this newsletter are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of OJJDP.

