

Homicides of School-Aged Children and Adolescents

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In response to the significant media attention concerning homicides of school-age children and adolescents, this CHDL Data Brief uses IVDRS data to examine the circumstances of homicides where the victim is 5 to 18 years of age; this issue combines data for 2005 through 2008 for homicides that occurred in Cook, DuPage, Kane and Peoria counties (Table 1). The annual homicide rate for the IVDRS counties ranges from 5.4 to 7.8 per 100,000; overall, the IVDRS counties have higher homicide rates than either Illinois or the U.S. for 2005 to 2007 (Figure 1).

There were 366 cases which comprised the dataset used for this analysis. The IVDRS counties saw an increase in homicides from 2005 (5.6 per 100,000) to 2008 (7.8 per 100,000) (Figure 1). These increases were accounted for primarily by City of Chicago youth (who experienced a peak in 2006 and 2008 at 13.9 and 17.3 per 100,000, respectively). The majority of deaths occurred to youth ages 16 and over, with approximately 30% of school-age homicide victims age 15 and younger (Figure 2). Males were far more likely to be the victim of a homicide than females, overall being seven times more likely than females to die from homicide (Figure 3).

TABLE 1. School-age homicide victims, rate per 100,000, 2005-08 (N = 366)

		All IVDRS Counties	City of Chicago	Suburban Cook County	Peoria, Kane and DuPage Counties
TOTAL	n	366	284	58	24
	rate	6.9	13.2	2.7	1.7
YEAR					
2005	n	79	64	10	5
	rate	5.6	11.7	1.9	1.5
2006	n	100	75	21	4
	rate	6.9	13.9	3.8	1.2
2007	n	76	54	13	9
	rate	5.4	10.0	2.4	2.6
2008	n	111	91	14	6
	rate	7.8	17.3	2.6	1.7
AGE					
5 to 13	n	39	23	11	5
	rate	1.1	1.8	< 1	< 1
14 to 15	n	66	54	8	4
	rate	8.4	18.6	2.7	2.1
16 to 17	n	150	117	24	9
	rate	19.1	40.1	8.0	4.8
18	n	111	90	15	6
	rate	29.8	59.4	11.1	7.0
GENDER					
Male	n	320	254	46	20
	rate	11.6	24.8	4.5	2.0
Female	n	45	29	12	4
	rate	1.7	2.9	1.2	0.6

FIGURE 1. School-age homicides by year, rate per 100,000, 2005-08 (N = 366)

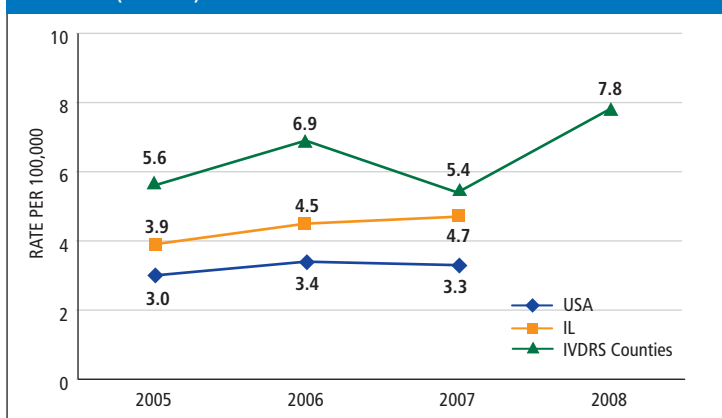


FIGURE 2. Percent of school-age homicides by age group, 2005-08 (N = 366)

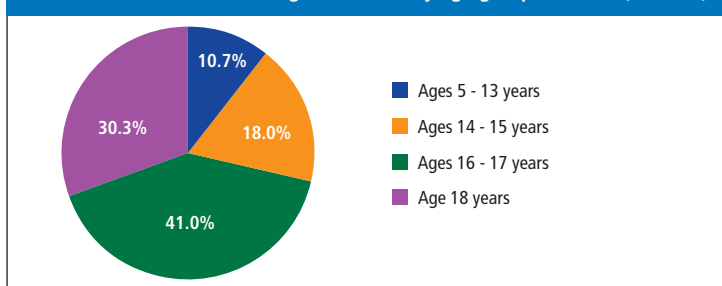
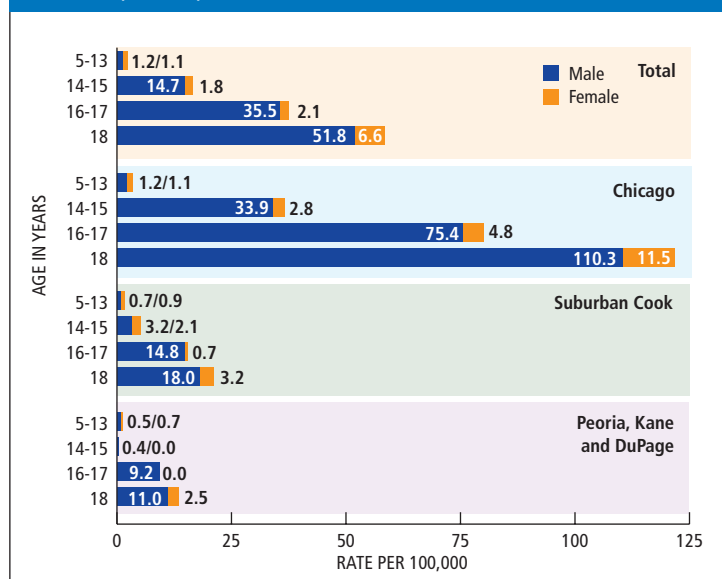


FIGURE 3. School-age homicides by gender, rate per 100,000, 2005-08 (N = 366)



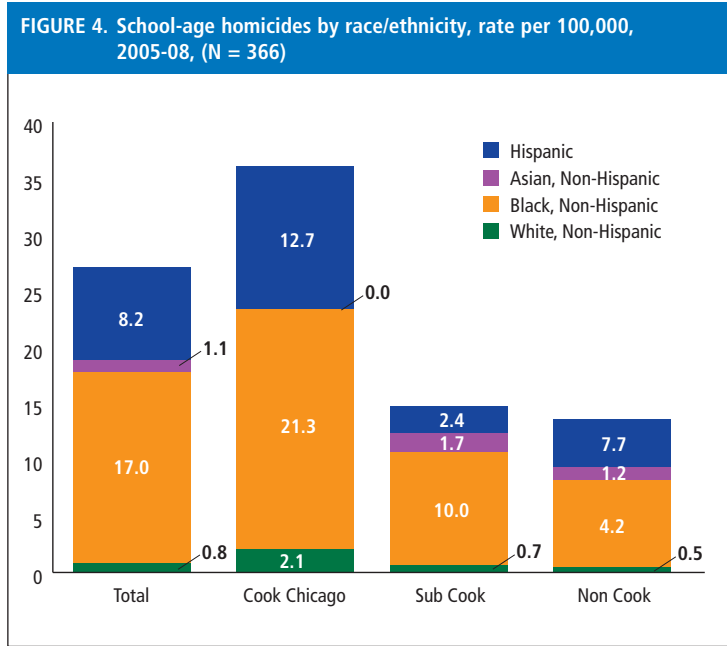
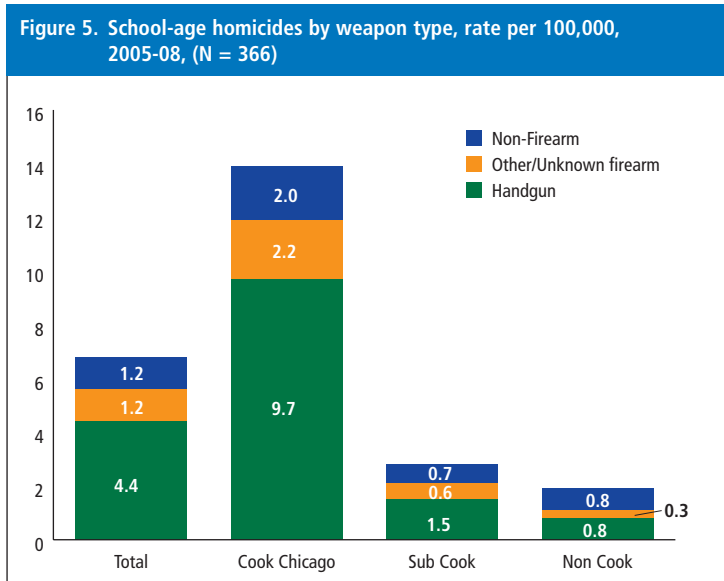
Race/Ethnicity and Weapon Type

African-American school aged children and adolescents were more likely than children and adolescents from any other racial or ethnic group to be victims of homicides, with an overall rate of 17.0 per 100,000. Hispanic youth were six to nine times more likely than white youth to be victims of homicide, with an overall rate of 8.2 deaths per 100,000; African American youth were ten to twenty times more likely than white youth to be victims of school-age homicide (Figure 4 and Table 2).

Firearms were used as the weapon in over 80% of the school-age homicides. School-age homicides in Chicago were six times more likely to be caused by a firearm than any other weapon. When firearm type could be identified (82% of the time, or 246 of 300), handguns were used as the weapon in 97.2% of all school-age homicides (Figure 5).

TABLE 2. School-age homicides by race/ethnicity and weapon used, rate per 100,000, 2005-08 (N = 366)

	All IVDRS Counties	City of Chicago	Suburban Cook County	Peoria, Kane and DuPage Counties	
RACE/ETHNICITY					
African-American, Non-Hispanic	n	225	180	37	8
	rate	17.0	21.3	10.0	7.7
Hispanic, Any Race	n	117	96	10	11
	rate	8.2	12.7	2.4	4.2
Caucasian, Non-Hispanic	n	18	7	7	4
	rate	0.8	2.1	0.7	0.5
Asian, Non-Hispanic	n	3	0	2	1
	rate	1.1	0.0	1.7	1.2
WEAPON					
Non-Firearm	n	66	41	15	10
	rate	1.2	2.0	0.7	0.8
Firearm	n	300	243	43	14
	rate	5.5	11.9	2.1	1.1
HANDGUN TYPE (%)					
Handgun	n	239	198	31	10
	%	97.2	97.1	96.9	100.0
Other firearm	n	7	6	1	0
	%	2.8	2.9	3.1	0.0



Domestic Events

The 366 homicides in this analysis were categorized into two groups: domestic homicides (46, or 12.4%, where homicide occurred in the home, porch, or yard); and non-domestic homicides (309, or 83.3%, where the homicide did not occur in or near the home). A small percentage of school-age homicides (11, or 3.0%) had no circumstance information available and cannot be placed into either group.

Domestic homicides were primarily cases of child abuse (71.7%) (Table 3). In 46 (39.4%) of these cases, the victim had a known history of child abuse. The next largest category includes apparently unintentional deaths that were ruled as homicides (such as playing with a firearm) and occurred in 17.4% of the cases. These apparently unintentional deaths were ruled as homicides in cases where the owner of the firearm might have been charged with a crime. Cases of firearm deaths ruled as accidental are not included in these figures. Other circumstances (10.8% of domestic events) include being a bystander when another family member was the target, being a victim of sexual assault (in each of these cases, there was a restraining order against the offender), and being found dead with no known circumstances.

TABLE 3. School-age domestic homicides, 2005-08 (n = 46)

TYPE OF DOMESTIC EVENT		
Child abuse	n	33
	%	71.7
History of abuse documented	n	13
	%	39.4
Playing with weapon/Unintentional death ruled homicide	n	8
	%	17.4
Other domestic event	n	5
	%	10.8

Non-Domestic Events

Among the 309 non-domestic homicides, 55.3% of the cases were ones in which the victim was targeted individually (Table 4). In 20.7% of the cases, the victim was with one or more people and at least one of the people was targeted (the victim or another person in the group). In 3.6% of the cases the victim was not the intended target (i.e., was a bystander) and in 20.4% of the cases there were no witnesses to the incident.

IVDRS classifies homicides that are identified as gang-related based on the initial police investigation; subsequent investigations may indicate a higher level of gang involvement. Table 4 indicates that, regardless of whether a homicide is known to be gang-related or not, the circumstances do not appear to be different.

		TOTAL (309)	Gang-related	Not known to be gang-related
Victim was clearly targeted/executed as an individual	n	171	49	122
	%	55.3	56.3	55.0
Victim was with one or more people and at least one was clearly targeted	n	64	21	43
	%	20.7	24.1	19.4
Victim was not the intended target (bystander)	n	11	2	9
	%	3.6	2.3	4.1
There were no witnesses to the incident	n	63	15	48
	%	20.4	17.2	21.6

Substance Use And Drug Involvement in Non-Domestic Events

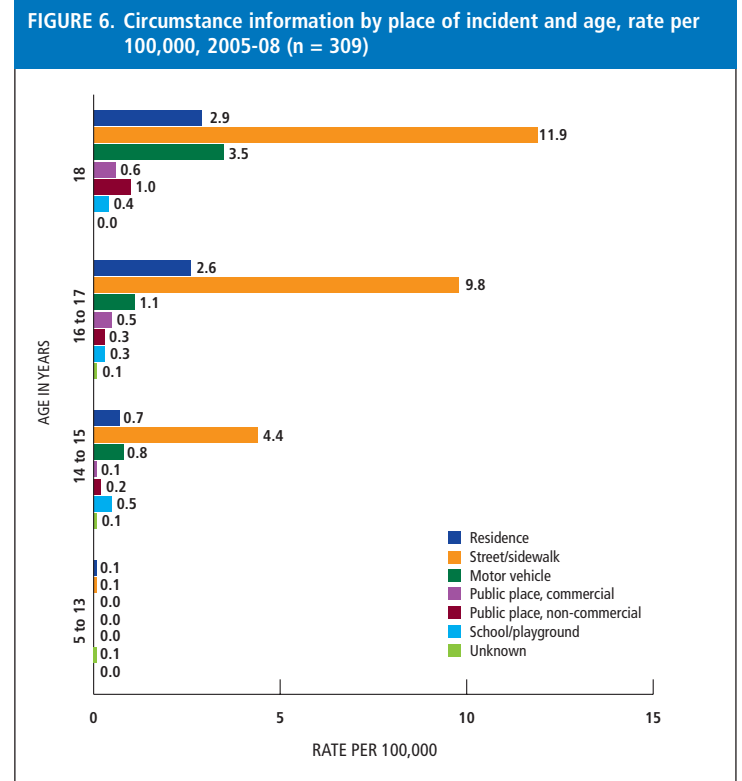
Among all non-domestic homicides in which drug presence was tested (n=309), drugs were implicated in the homicide and/or found at the scene in only 4.5% of the cases. The victim tested positive for alcohol in 18.4% of the cases and tested positive for cocaine and opiates in 2.5% and 3.2% of the cases, respectively (Table 5).

		Yes	No/Not Documented
Victim tested positive for alcohol (tested in 282 cases)	n	52	230
	%	18.4	81.6
Victim tested positive for cocaine (tested in 282 cases)	n	7	275
	%	2.5	97.5
Victim tested positive for opiates (tested in 283 cases)	n	9	274
	%	3.2	96.8
Drugs were implicated in circumstance/ found at scene (investigated in 309 cases)	n	14	295
	%	4.5	95.5

Locations of Non-Domestic Homicides

The location of non-domestic homicides was most often on the street, sidewalk or in an alley (62.5%), followed by at a residence (15.5%) and in a motor vehicle (11.3%) (Table 6). Among 18-year-olds, the homicide occurred more often in a motor vehicle than in a residence (Figure 6).

Location		TOTAL (309)	5 to 13 (10)	14 to 15 (59)	16 to 17 (142)	18 (98)
House/Driveway/Porch/ Yard/CHA	n	48	3	6	25	14
	%	15.5	30.0	10.2	17.6	14.3
Street/Sidewalk/Alley	n	193	4	38	94	57
	%	62.5	40.0	64.4	66.2	58.2
Motor Vehicle	n	35	0	7	11	17
	%	11.3	0.0	11.9	7.7	17.3
Public Place, Commercial (Bar/Nightclub, Store, Hotel/Motel, Other)	n	10	1	1	5	3
	%	3.2	10.0	1.7	3.5	3.1
Public Place, Non-Commercial (Parking Lot/Garage, Vacant Lot, Abandoned Bldg, Public Trans., Natural Area)	n	10	0	2	3	5
	%	3.2	0.0	3.4	2.1	5.1
School, Sports/Athletic Area, Park/Playground	n	11	2	4	3	2
	%	3.6	20.0	6.8	2.1	2.0
Unknown	n	2	0	1	1	0
	%	0.6	0.0	1.7	0.7	0.0



Circumstances of Non-Domestic Homicides

The majority of school-age homicides involved the offender approaching the victim on foot or by car, shooting the victim and then immediately fleeing the scene (Table 6). The next most common occurrence was the offender approaching and/or fleeing the scene by vehicle. Homicides which occurred at the scene, “in the heat of the moment” were almost always the result of a verbal altercation, the victim being either a participant or bystander. This pattern held for all those ages 14 and older (Figure 7).

Of particular interest are those deaths which were known to have been preceded by a verbal altercation, either immediately (i.e., at the scene) or otherwise (Figure 8). Among those ages 16 to 17, a verbal altercation was known to precede one-quarter of the homicides; among 14- to 15- and 18-year-olds, verbal altercations preceded one-fifth and less than one-sixth, respectively.

TABLE 6. School-age non-domestic homicides by circumstances immediately preceding the homicide, 2005-08 (n=309)

Method of approach		TOTAL (309)	Verbal altercation (72)	No verbal altercation/Unknown (237)
Offender and victim were together immediately prior to homicide (e.g. at a party)	n	54	51	3
	%	17.5	70.8	1.3
Victim and offender were NOT together prior to the homicide:				
Offender approached on foot	n	87	5	82
	%	28.2	6.9	34.6
Offender approached by vehicle	n	79	12	67
	%	25.6	16.7	28.3
Offender approach is unknown/there were no witnesses	n	89	4	85
	%	28.8	5.6	35.9

FIGURE 7. School-age non-domestic homicides by circumstances immediately preceding homicide, by age, 2005-08 (n=309)

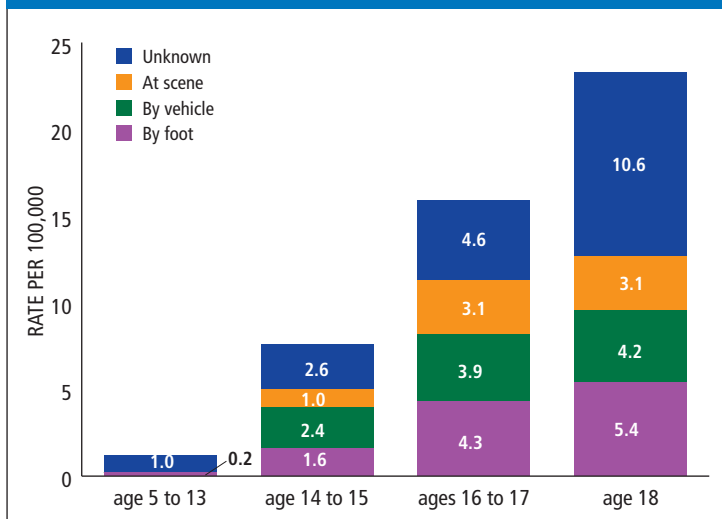
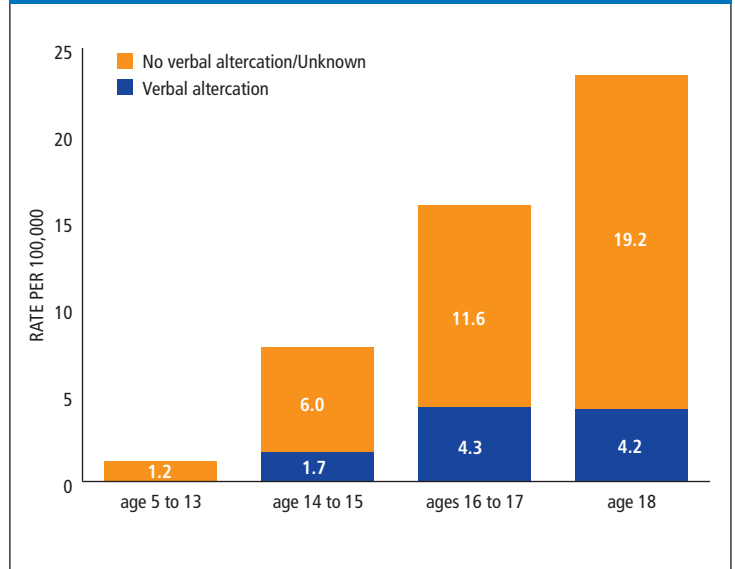


FIGURE 8. School-age non-domestic homicides by circumstances immediately preceding homicide, by age, 2005-08 (n = 309)



TECHNICAL NOTES

The Illinois Violent Death Reporting System (IVDRS) is a project of the Child Health Data Lab at Children’s Memorial Hospital. It is based on the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS). The project seeks to help researchers and policymakers determine the circumstances and risk factors associated with homicide, suicide and other violent deaths by linking timely data from multiple sources. In Illinois, we collect this information in Cook, Kane and Peoria counties. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of our data-providing agencies including the Cook County Medical Examiner, the Kane and Peoria County Coroners, the Illinois Department of Public Health, and the Chicago Police Department. For additional information on NVDRS, see preventviolence.net.

What is a violent death?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) establishes standards for all of the state-level Violent Death Reporting Systems, such as the one in Illinois. The CDC defines violent death as homicide, suicide, unintentional firearm death, death from legal intervention, death related to terrorism and death from undetermined causes.

- Cook County (which includes Chicago) is the source of the majority of IVDRS data; the data cannot be understood as representative of Illinois as a whole.
- All rates calculated for this newsletter are based on resident deaths. Rates are not computed for fewer than six cases. All data is accurate as of the date received and is subject to change due to ongoing investigations. Numbers will not always match as data is incomplete in some cases.
- Population data for IVDRS counties, including Chicago, from U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2005, 2006, and 2005-07 Estimates). Available from URL: <http://factfinder.census.gov>