

Background Memo

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SUBJECT: RedEye Homicide Tracker, Police Beats & Illinois Violent Death Reporting System (IVDRS)

I. How RedEye identifies cases

RedEye's "Tracking homicides in Chicago" division identifies cases using the following sources: the Chicago Breaking News Center, the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office and the Chicago Police Department. Tracy Swartz, a RedEye reporter at Tribune Company is responsible for organizing the data.

Each day the homicide entries are initially made using updates released by the Chicago Breaking News Center, part of the *Chicago Tribune*. These updates release information including time, location, number of victims, weapon used, and a scenario of the murder if such information is available. However, the RedEye cannot rely on the Chicago Breaking News updates in entirety. There are instances in which it is initially unclear if the victim died resulting from a homicide crime or if the victim's injuries were fatal. When initial information cannot specify the crime as murder, the RedEye will wait for a police investigation by the Chicago Police Department. The police investigation will be noted and set aside. When initial information from the crime reports the victim to be alive but later dies from related wounds, it is termed a "delayed fatal". News networks are not reliable in ultimately reporting a "delayed fatal", therefore the RedEye must cross-check the deaths examined by the office of the medical examiner.

Each day the Cook County Medical Examiner's office provides the news networks with information on all deaths in the county, including autopsy reports, in a 'daily ledger'. At the end of each year, the RedEye will file FOIA requests with the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office to acquire information such as autopsy reports on the murder victims from once pending police investigations. This is an ongoing project due to delays from pending police investigations, therefore data may not be accurate until months after the preceding year has ended.

The source EveryBlock (<http://chicago.everyblock.com/>) was used to compile homicide data from the year 2008. Everyblock is a website capable of browsing specific occurrences in a particular zipcode.

II. How designated beats are defined and what their relationship is to their districts

According to Professor Wes Skogan of Northwestern University, in 1990 the Chicago Police Department re-drew the police beat boundaries in the city of Chicago. The 1990 police beat formation intended to disperse police workload by crime incident. The beat boundaries were drawn to equalize police workload. Because 1 beat generally has only 1 police car on patrol at any given time, the boundaries for an area with a high population of crime need to be smaller than an area with a low population of crime. Since there are a total of 281 police beats, there

are at least a total of 281 police patrolling the streets at any given time. A police dispatch system is designed to keep each police officer within their distinct beats at all times

Police beats are within districts, and districts are all within the 5 areas of Chicago. There are 5 districts within each area (in the wake of 9/11 the city of Chicago created a special area control district in Area 4 which minimized this area's total districts to 3). According to the Chicago Police Department, "each police district is divided into 3 sectors, and each sector is further divided into 3 to 5 beats." "Each of the City's 281 police beats is numbered so that it can be uniquely identified: 1. The first one or two digits identify the district; 2. The next digit is the sector number; 3. The last digit is the beat number. For example, Beat 521 is the 1st beat in the 2nd sector of the 5th Police District."

Generally there is one officer per beat patrol car, however during the evening and in the more active crime police beats there could be two officers per car. Within each district there are a number of sergeants, 3 lieutenants also known as watch commanders, and 1 district commander. The sergeants are the beat officers' immediate supervisors and the sergeants report to the lieutenant on call. The lieutenants work in shifts as watch commanders of the police beats within their entire district, and are in charge of roll call for each shift. There is 1 district commander per district. A rapid response car is assigned to a sector which includes 3-4 beats with each district.

A spreadsheet created by Erica Haft and Colin Johnson documenting 2009 Chicago homicides per police beat is available, as well as a hand-plotted map.

The Chicago Police Department's online CLEARMAP^[1] Crime Summary system includes choropleth maps and tables, and of particular interest is a map outlining the different police beats and allows for magnification upon a specific area and/or district in Chicago to view the beat boundaries. A chart outside of the map provides information on the occurrence of crimes within each beat and allows one to specifically choose the category of crime that is of interest (in this research's case: homicides in the 1st and 2nd degree). To further narrow results, one can choose a time frame ranging from the past 90/ 180/ 270/ 365 days. However, the map magnification does not provide information regarding location of homicide, murder weapon used, time and/or date.

III. How supplemental homicide reports fit into this scheme

The Cook County Medical Examiner's Office releases daily ledgers of murder victims to all news networks in the area. This is the "daily workload" of crimes resulting in death and reveals all public information such as name, cause of death (when known), location, and case number. The daily ledger is faxed out at 2 pm after the medical examiner's daily afternoon meeting. Since this is public record and given to news networks to disperse, it could be likely that CLEARMAP does not include the details of each crime due to sheer volume/time management. The daily ledger contains anywhere from approximately 15-30 (or more) entries each day.

IV. Look at the data on homicide being reported by the Illinois violent death reporting system

The Illinois Violent Death Reporting System (IVDRS) is an active research project of the Children's Memorial Research Center and funded by the Illinois Department of Public Health, The Joyce Foundation, and Chicago Department of Public Health. The Illinois Violent Death Reporting System's mission is "... to develop a state-wide data repository related to violent deaths. With these data, policy makers and researchers will be able to analyze the causes and

correlates of violent deaths in order to develop effective prevention policies and programs for the State of Illinois.” It combines information from agencies such as the police departments, medical examiners, crime labs and health departments to form a more comprehensive picture of circumstances surrounding death in Illinois, and to “prevent future violent deaths”. The project began in 2005.

“The IVDRS is based on the footprint of the National Violent Death Reporting System, sponsored by the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control^[2], and it includes all deaths that are the result of homicide, suicide, unintentional firearm incidents, terrorism, legal intervention, and other forms of injury where the intention is not known.” The IVDRS uses the same software and method that was developed by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the National Violent Death Reporting System^[3]. It is able to use this same software and methodology even though it is not national but instead state specific. The IVDRS obtains information from sources such as medical examiner’s offices or coroner’s office (depending on the county), police reports, and newspapers. The initial extraction comes from the medical examiner or coroner’s office. The IVDRS has a memorandum of understanding with these offices because it is a research project in the Children’s Memorial Hospital. Research assistants go into the medical examiner/coroner’s office to get the case they need and extract the data from the case file. All of the information they obtain is public record. The IVDRS notes that the main source of its data comes from Cook County (including Chicago), and that its data may therefore not be representative of Illinois as a whole.

Susan McClain, an epidemiologist working with the IVDRS at the Children’s Memorial Hospital, will send via email the most recent newsletter from the IVDRS pertaining to homicides. The topic is homicide in school age children in adolescence from the IVDRS counties (Chicago included). There are 2 more anticipated newsletters for this year that will be sent out back-to-back in October and November focused on suicide.

*Note: WISQARS^[4] is a searchable database through CDC that provides numbers on violent death/injuries by state (but does not include Illinois)- this could be useful for comparison of data to other cities/states. WISQARS divides data into 4 categories: fatal injury, nonfatal injury, violent death, and cost of injury. Of interest to this research is the category on violent death that includes: number of violent- related deaths and death rates, intent of injury (unintentional, homicide, legal intervention, suicide, undetermined intent, and homicide followed by suicide), mechanism (cause) of injury (e.g., firearm, cut/pierce/stab, hanging/suffocation, poisoning), details about victims and offenders, including demographics, victim-offender relationship status, and facts about the injury incident found at National Violent Death Reporting (NVDRS), and details about suicide victims suspected of a recent homicide. Violent death reports are available from years 2003 to 2008^[5].

V. Where homicide statistics on Chicago are presented and how they differ from one another

Homicide statistics on Chicago are presented in the Chicago Police Department’s Annual Reports^[6], the Office of the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Annual Reports^[7], the Uniform Crime Reports of Illinois^[8], the *RedEye*’s Tracking Homicide in Chicago division^[9], and the Illinois Violent Death Reporting System^[10].

The Chicago Police Department’s Annual Reports are the most comprehensive source of information for homicide statistics. The annual reports available online to the general public date back to 1965 but the information available in the earliest reports is not as exhaustive as the

most current 2009 report. Recent reports provide information on murder statistics according to race, cause of death, motive (causal factors), clearances, age of victim, age of offender, percentage of firearm recovery, number of murders per district, number of murders per community area, arrests by offense classification (murder or non-negligent manslaughter), and arrests by offense classification further divided into gender, race and age.

The Office of the Cook County Medical Examiner's Annual Reports are available through a FOIA request. The annual reports offer information such as the date, time, age, race, manner of death, cause of death, and cause of death by manner of all deaths in Cook County. In light of our research's aim, Professor Wes Skogan of Northwestern University notes some potential concerns and points of interest in the medical examiner's methodological approach to the 2008/2009 annual reports and its data:

1. Do not include a separate tabulation for Latinos, and instead, the 1,245,000 Latinos in Cook County are mostly found among 'whites'.
2. An autopsy is always performed in homicides (p.40, 2008)
3. The 'cause of death by manner' figures for homicide (p.49, 2008) are not specific enough- we would like to see 'specific cause of death' separately for homicide (gun, knife, etc. are included but are not broken down for homicide)
4. Blacks get killed (2.6-to-1); whites kill themselves (6-to-1) (p.37-38, 2008).

The Uniform Crime Reports of Illinois is the central repository for crime statistics in Illinois. Reporting agencies from all units of government in Illinois are required to submit crime statistics on a monthly basis to the Illinois Uniform Crime Reporting Program (I-UCR). Direct reporting agencies include: police departments (727), sheriff's offices (102), colleges and universities (35), secretary of state (1), Illinois State Police (1), hospitals (2), railroads (13), park districts (9), airports (1), forest preserves (5), arson/fire departments (1), metropolitan enforcement groups/ task forces (1), other agencies (5), and remaining 'non-direct' agencies (130). The I-UCR Program's crime index is analogous to the FBI National Program's Eight Crime Index offenses: murder and non-negligent slaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

The *RedEye's* Tracking Homicide in Chicago division began in 2009 and utilizes data from the Chicago Police Department, Cook County Medical Examiner's Office and the *Chicago Tribune's* Breaking News Center to document each murder that occurs in Chicago's 25 districts for a given year (2008- Present). Specific details of each murder are included such as an address, date, time, location, community area, age, gender, race, name, cause of death, and sometimes a link to an online news story reporting the murder^[11]. The *RedEye's* methodological approach and purpose is based on *Homicide Report*^[12], created for the Los Angeles Times, and adapted for use in Chicago.

See **Section IV** for information on the Illinois Violent Death Reporting System.

[1]CLEAR stands for Citizen Law Enforcement Analysis and Reporting.

[2]<http://www.childrensmrc.org/chdl/illinoisviolentdeathreportingsystem/>

[3]<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nvdrs/index.html>

[4]<http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>

[5]<http://wisqars.cdc.gov:8080/nvdrs/nvdrsDisplay.jsp>

[6]<https://portal.chicagopolice.org/portal/page/portal/ClearPath/News/Statistical%20Reports/Annual%20Reports>

[7]FOIA requested annual reports- 2008/2009

[8]<http://www.isp.state.il.us/crime/ucrhome.cfm>

[9]<http://homicides.redeyechicago.com/>

[10]Triannual newsletters

[11]Example for the year 2010: <https://spreadsheets.google.com/pub?key=thDxIEe-MoPqJBVRepn5-2w&output=html>

[12]<http://projects.latimes.com/homicide/blog/page/1/>