

**CRIME
&
JUSTICE
BULLETIN 6**

A Study of Homicide in Barbados

**NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON CRIME PREVENTION
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL**

Foreword

This Report is the sixth in a series of publications that are designed to disseminate information on the criminal justice system in Barbados, as well as to inform policy makers and practitioners. It examines the trends and patterns for homicide in Barbados with a particular focus on victim/offender relationships, circumstances and motives, and the influences of age and gender on victims and offenders.

Our Consultants Aguda Quality Solutions Inc. were instrumental in conducting the fieldwork as well as for putting this report together. We are grateful to all of those persons who would have provided expert opinions, data, and feedback on this publication.

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1. Executive Summary

The main objective of this study was to examine the trends and patterns that exist for homicide in Barbados with respect to the victim/accused relationship, circumstances/motives, and age/gender of victim and accused. A sample of cases from the period 1991 to 2001 were examined, and the research expanded to include previous convictions and employment status of the accused, murder weapons, and single versus multiple-accused homicides. A sample size of 85 cases out of a possible 183 solved homicides for that period gave a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 7.8. All of the information was taken from police case files that were made available to the researcher by the 3 main divisions of the Royal Barbados Police Force.

The study found that the major cause of homicides is disputes (including ongoing disputes, one-off disputes, and self-defence due to disputes) (63%), and that in 85% percent of homicide cases the victim was known to the accused person(s). There is an upward trend in the proportion of homicides as a result of disputes but a downward trend in the probability of the accused person(s) and the victim being known to each other.

Males are at a significantly greater risk of being both victims and perpetrators of homicide. Young men 30 years old or younger are most at risk for committing homicides (75%), and to a lesser extent for being the victims of homicide (57%). They are also more likely to carry out such acts of violence when they are in groups of 3 or 4 persons. Weapons are used in most cases of homicides, with knives, cutlasses, scissors and firearms making up 80% of homicide weapons, and firearms becoming increasingly likely to be used. A further finding was that over 60% of persons who are accused of homicide are neither unemployed nor have any previous convictions or charges against them. However, the trends show that there is an increasing likelihood of accused persons having previous convictions or charges.

The main recommendations for reducing the homicide rate in Barbados based on the findings of this study are for programmes on anger management and dispute resolution skills to be made widely available, for the encouragement and development of positive male role models, and for more stringent restrictions to be imposed on the carrying of weapons such as knives, cutlasses and firearms.

2. Background Information

The homicide rate in Barbados over the last 30 years has fluctuated from 4.3 to 11.5 per hundred thousand of the population with an average of 7.2, which translates to an actual average number of just over 18 homicides a year. While the figures fluctuate greatly, the most credible trend would suggest that there is actually a very gradual fall in the homicide rate. The classification of a homicide as murder or manslaughter has been found to vary over the 30-year period and this study addressed homicide as a whole.

A fair amount of information on homicides is compiled by the statistics department of the Royal Barbados Police Force, which includes the name, address, age and gender of the victim and of the accused, familial connections between the victim and accused, station where the murder was reported, and whether a firearm was used. From this information, some analysis can be carried out to determine various trends and patterns for homicide in Barbados. However, the statistical department does not collate information on the relationship between the victim and the accused person(s), nor on the circumstances, causes or motives for the homicide, even though this information is usually recorded in the case file. Relationship here refers to any previous connection that would indicate that the victim and the accused were known to each other.

This report is the result of a study of the police records and case files on homicides over the 11-year period from 1991 to 2001. The main objective of the study was to examine the trends and patterns that exist for homicide in Barbados with respect to the victim/accused relationship, circumstances/motives, and age/gender of victim and accused. The study focused on the relationship between the victim and the accused as described above, as well as on the circumstances and motives surrounding the homicide. It also looked at the age and gender of the victim and of the accused, previous convictions and employment status of the accused, murder weapon used, and single versus multiple-accused homicides.

3. Methodology

3.1 Objectives

There were two main objectives:

- Collation of information on
 - the victim/accused relationship;
 - the circumstances and motives surrounding homicides;
 - age and gender of victim and of accused.

- Analysis of the information collated to determine the trends and patterns that exist for homicide over the 11-year period 1991 to 2001.

3.2 Approach to gathering information for research

The approach used was as follows:

An assessment tool was developed for the collection of information on homicide from case files, to ensure that the same information was collected on each case. Requests were made for case files on homicide to be made available to the researcher, and these were then examined to extract information on each case of homicide that took place during the 11-year period from 1991 to 2001 for which records were still available.

This was followed by the compilation and analysis of the results from the police records and case files, and then the preparation of this report on homicide, including an analysis of the relationship between victim and accused, the circumstances and/or motives, and the age and gender of the victim and of the accused.

3.3 Sample Size

The sample size of homicide cases that were examined was determined by the number of police case files made available to the researcher for this study. Case files for unsolved murders are considered to be confidential, and may or may not have a named suspect – these case files were not included in the sample examined.

For the 11-year period 1991 to 2001, there were a total of 204 homicide cases of which 183 were solved. Of these, a sample of 85 case files were examined, which gave a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 7.8 for solved homicides. It should be noted that while there is a case file for each victim, 14 of the cases had more than 1 accused person. Therefore, the total number of victims studied was 85 while the total number of accused persons was 114.

3.4 Presentation of Information

This report presents the findings of the study starting with the motives or circumstances surrounding homicides, and the relationship between the victim and the accused person(s). It then goes on to present the findings on gender and age of both victims and accused persons, then the employment status and previous convictions of the accused persons. Results on multiple-accused versus single-accused homicides, and on the weapons used in committing homicides are then presented, followed by a summary of the overall findings.

For each sub-section of the findings, there is a pie chart or a histogram which shows the overall results for the particular area that the sub-section focuses on. This is followed by a chart showing the trend for that area over the period 1991 to 2001. Note, however, that the sample size limits the confidence interval for every year in the study. The section on findings and results of the study is then followed by a short section on recommendations and a conclusion.

4. Overall Findings

4.1 Motives / Circumstances

Over ½ of the homicide cases in the period studied were the result of disputes, either on-going disputes (30%) or one-off disputes (28%), with a further 5% in self-defence (also due to disputes). This brought the proportion of homicides as a result of disputes to 63%.

Theft, robbery, burglary and rape accounted for only 12% of cases, while crimes of passion or jealousy accounted for another 13%. “Psychiatric” refers to homicides in which the accused person had a history of serious psychiatric illness such as schizophrenia, and the evidence suggests that the homicide was as a result of such illness. These cases account for 4% of homicides.

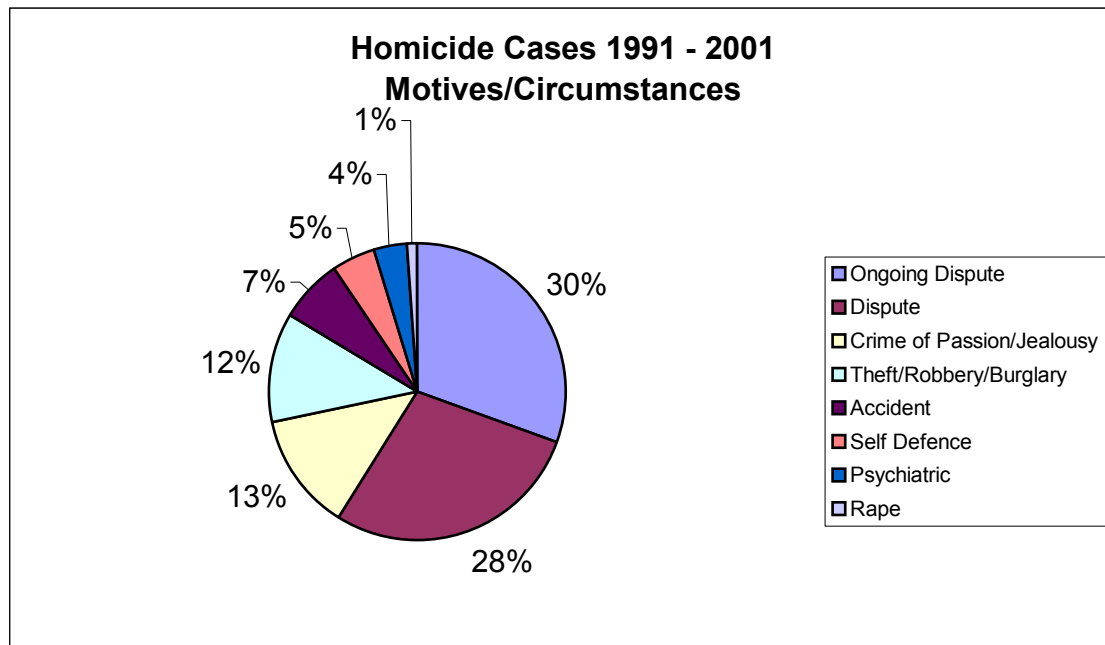


Figure 1 – Overall Motives/Circumstances

The trends shown in the chart below would indicate that homicides as a result of disputes have doubled as a proportion of total homicides in the 11-year period. Crimes of passion have fallen significantly, and theft, robbery and burglary have increased slightly as an overall proportion of the motives for homicide.

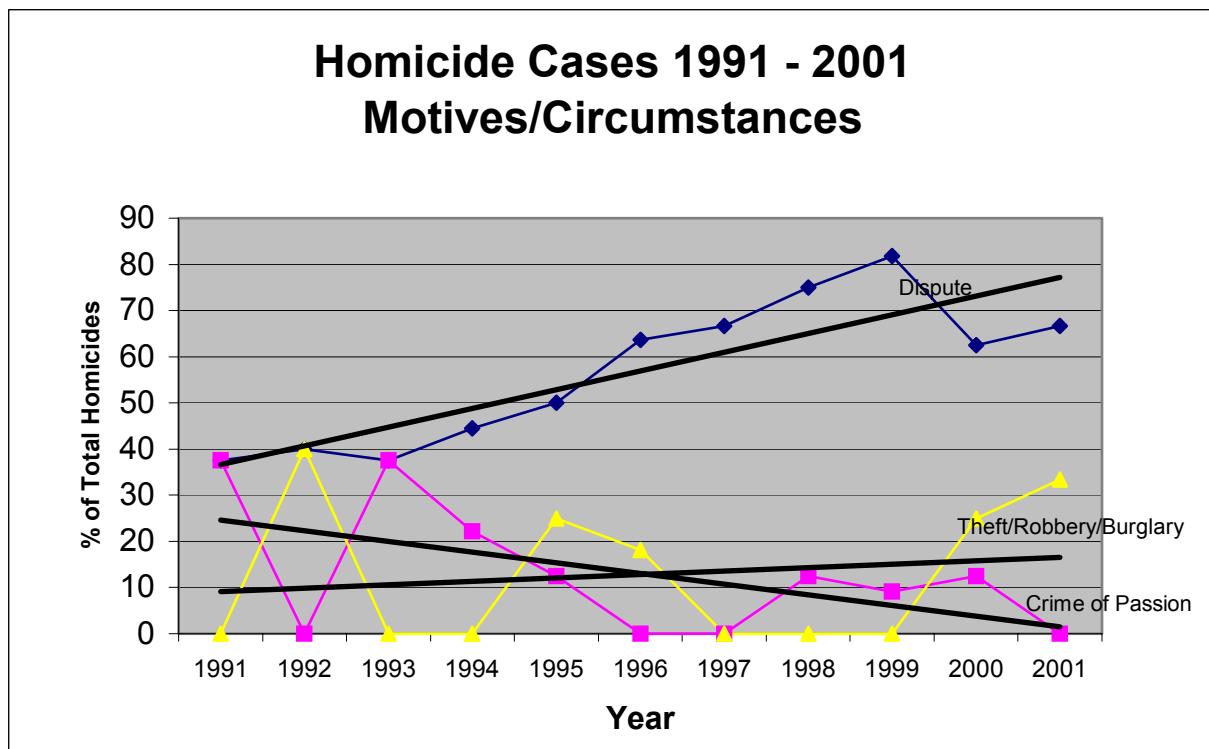


Figure 2 – Trends in Motives/Circumstances

4.2 Relationship between Accused and Victim

One of the main objectives of this project was to study the relationships between the victims and the persons accused of their homicides. The relationship is generally only noted in the crime statistics if there were familial ties, or the persons lived in the same household. For the purposes of this study, however, “relationship” simply means that the victim and the accused person(s) were known to each other. The overwhelming majority (85%) of the sample of homicides in Barbados for the period studied were committed by persons known to the victims.

The chart below shows the percentage of cases where there was a relationship, shown according to the motive or circumstances of the homicide.

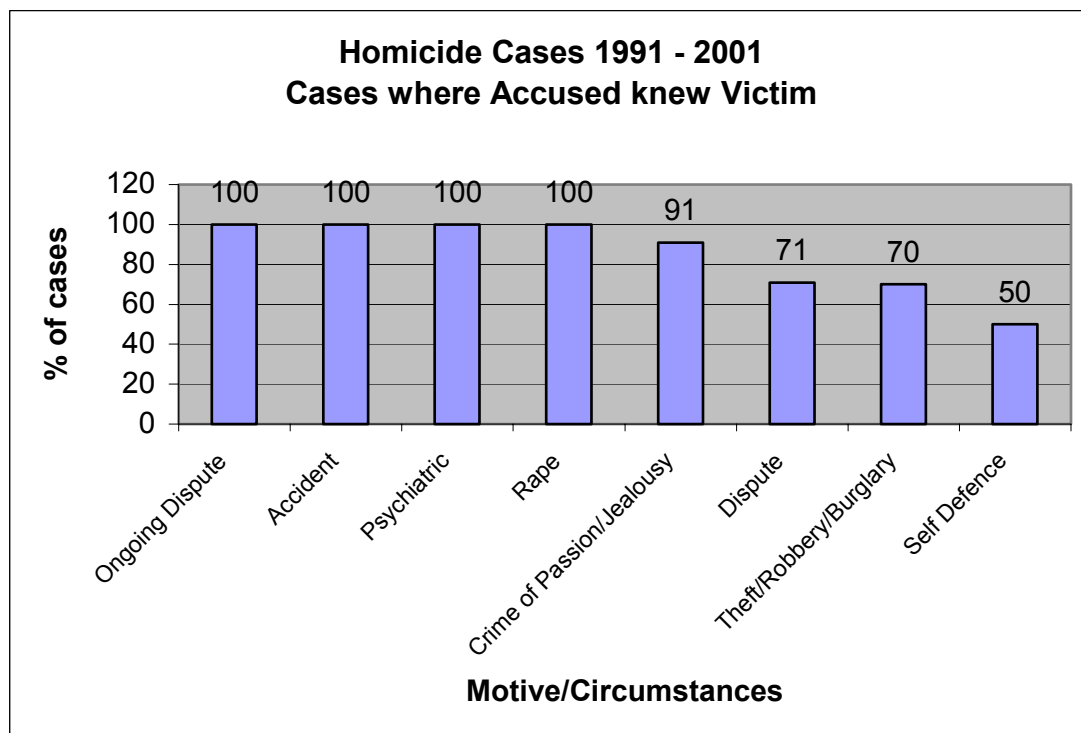


Figure 3 – Overall Relationships between Accused and Victim

The trend chart below shows a gradual decline in the proportion of homicides where the victim and the accused knew each other.

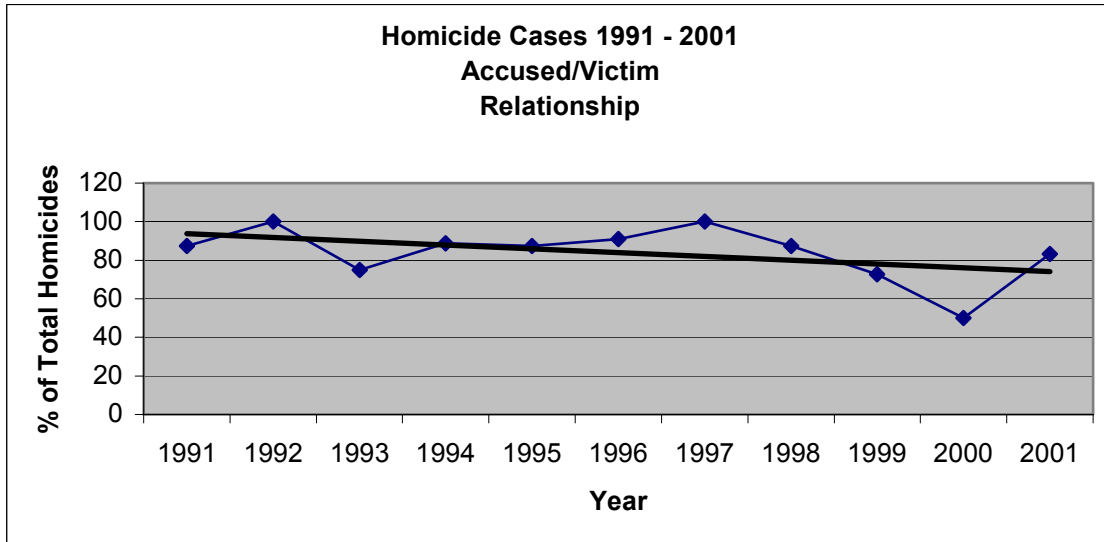


Figure 4 – Trend in Relationships between Accused and Victim

4.3 Motives and Relationships

The chart below shows the number of cases for each type of motive/set of circumstances, as well as the number of cases where the accused and the victim were known to each other. It also shows the homicide cases that were known to have involved drugs – approximately 8% of the homicides involved drugs, and these cases were mainly the results of disputes with 1 case being the result of a robbery involving drugs.

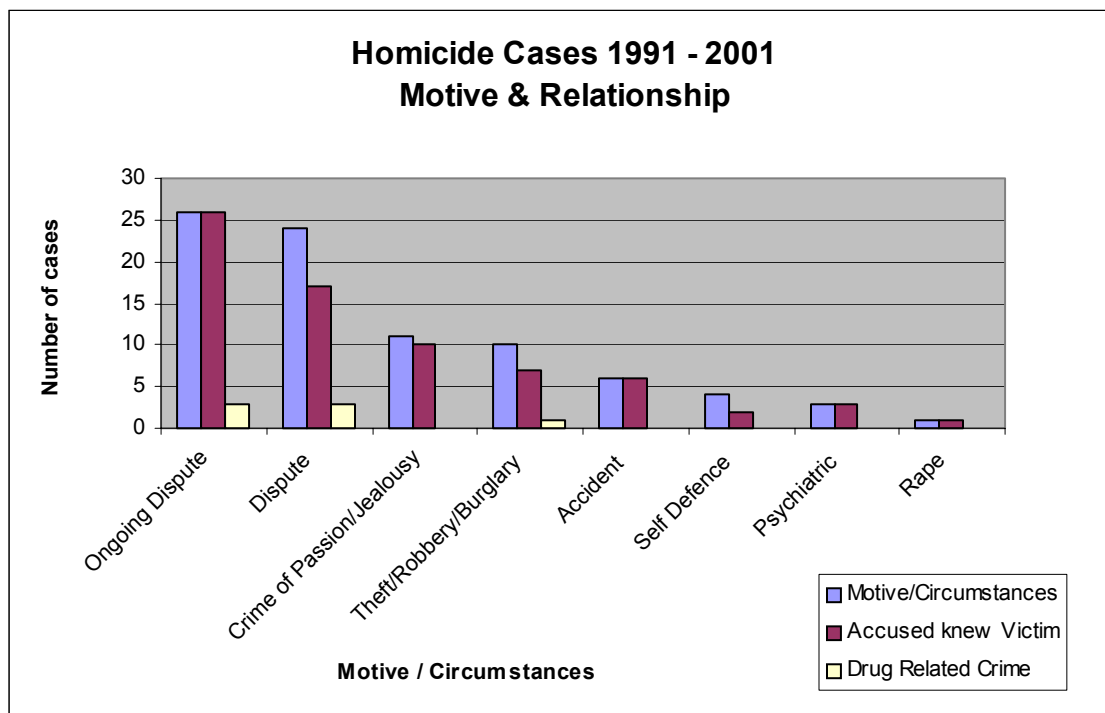


Figure 5 – Overall Motives and Relationships between Accused and Victim

Disputes are the single most common motives for homicide, and that trend has increased significantly over the 11-year period being studied. The existence of a relationship between the accused and the victim has declined over the same period, although not as appreciably as the increase in disputes as a motive. These trends would seem to imply that more disputes between persons who do not know each other are resulting in homicides.

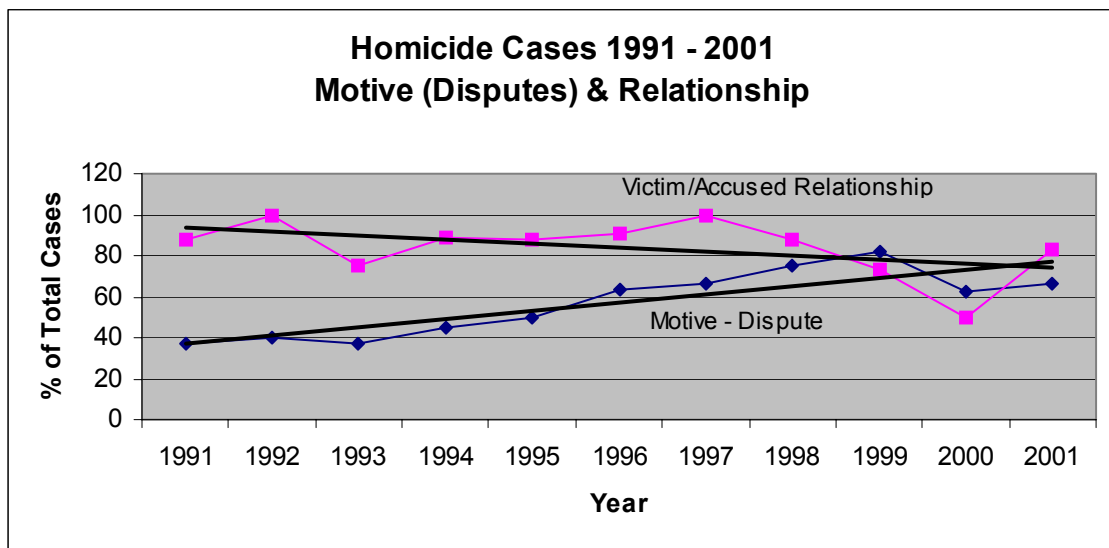


Figure 6 – Trends in Main Motive and Relationships between Accused and Victim

4.4 Gender of Victims and Accused Persons

The majority of homicide victims and persons accused of homicide in the period studied were male. However, while the percentage of male victims was 81%, that of male accused persons was 94%.

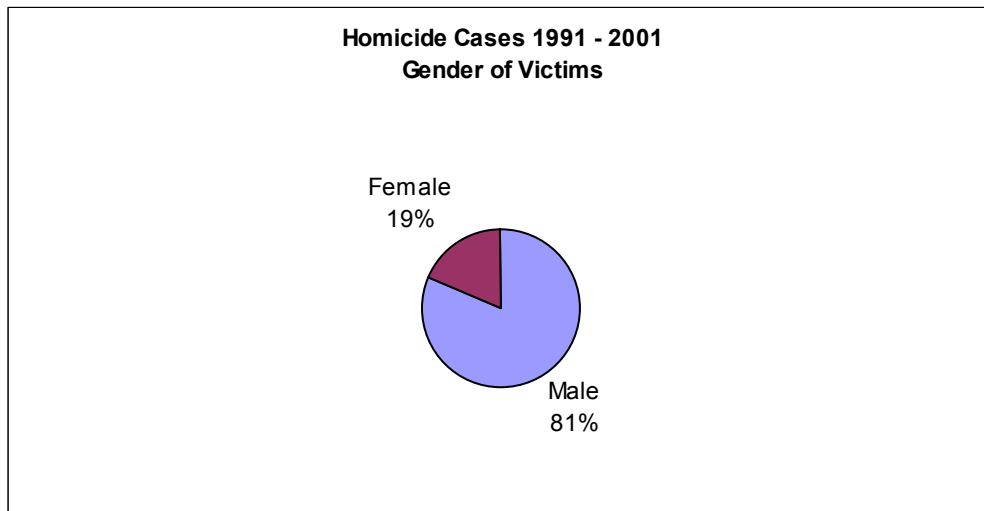


Figure 7 – Overall Gender of Victims

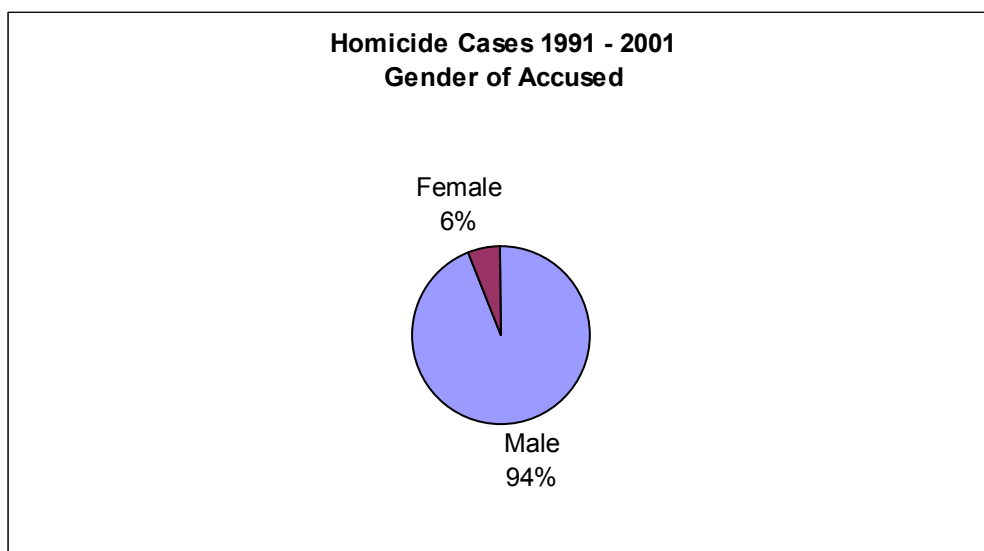


Figure 8 – Overall Gender of Accused Persons

The trend charts below show that victims of homicide are increasingly more likely to be male, and less likely to be female. The same general trend exists for persons accused of homicide but with a much less significant change over the years included in this study.

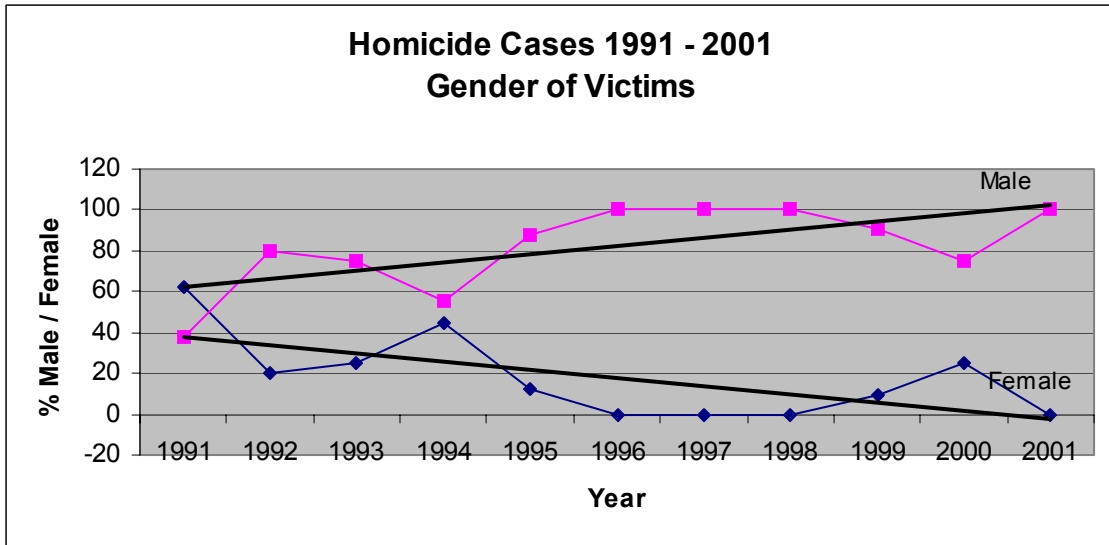


Figure 9 – Trend in Gender of Victims

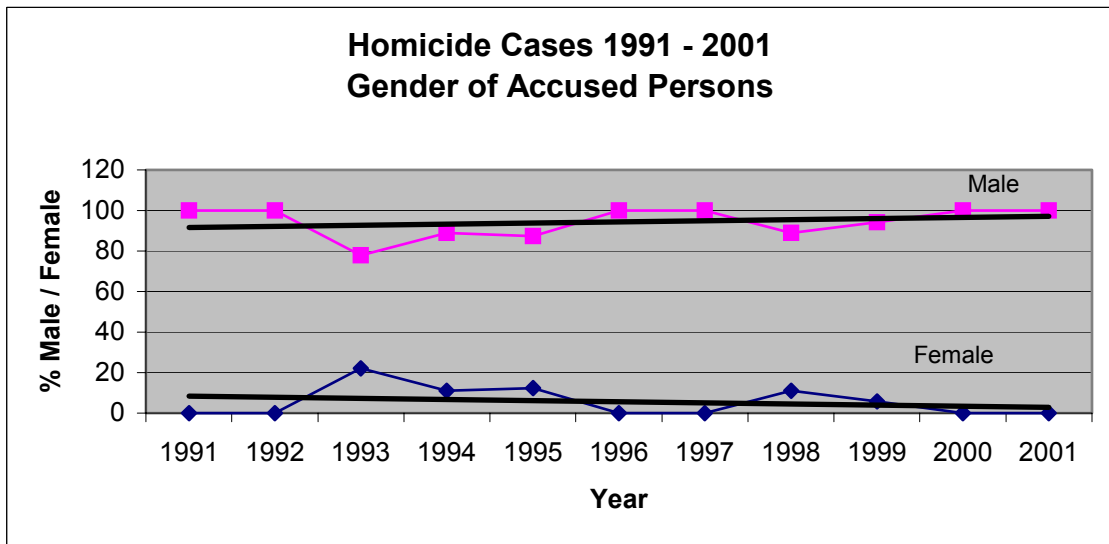


Figure 10 – Trend in Gender of Accused Persons

4.5 Age of Victims and Accused Persons

Victims of homicide were found to be generally older than the persons accused of homicide. For victims the average age was 33 and the median age was 29, whereas for the accused persons the average age was 26.6 and the median age was 24.

As can be seen from the charts below, the age range of the majority of victims was 15 to 40 years (76.5%), while for accused persons this range was 15 to 30 years (75.4%), indicating that both victims and persons accused of homicide are more likely to be young people than persons over 40 years. Females made up 18.8% of the victims studied, and their average age was 35.7 years with the median age being 34.5 years, while for male victims the average age was 32.3 years and the median age was 28 years - this shows that female victims tend to be slightly older than male victims.

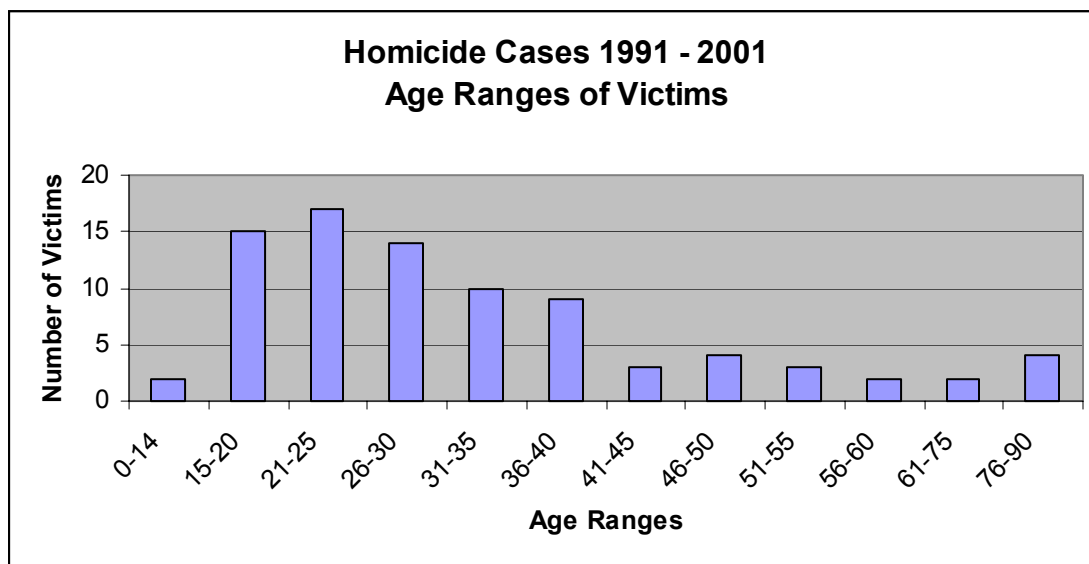


Figure 11 – Overall Age Ranges of Victims

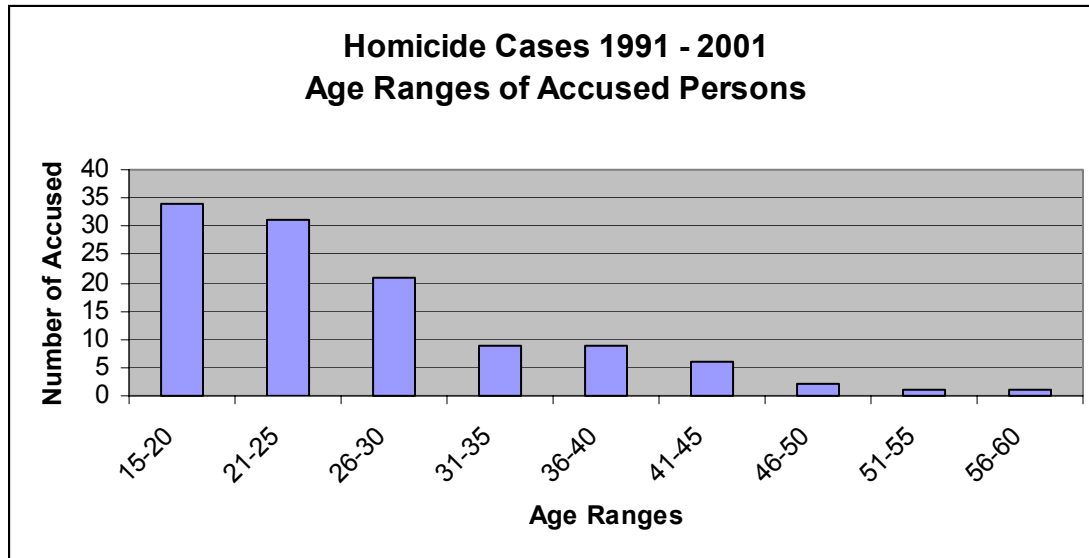


Figure 12 – Overall Age Ranges of Accused Persons

Over $\frac{1}{2}$ of the accused persons were 25 years old or less, while $\frac{3}{4}$ of them were 30 years old or less. The oldest person accused of homicide in the sample was 59 years old, and the youngest was 15 years old.

Of the victims studied, $\frac{2}{5}$ were 25 years old or less while just over $\frac{1}{2}$ of them were 30 years old or less. The oldest victim was 88 years old while the youngest was just 19 months old.

The age range of homicide victims is clearly very wide, while that of persons accused of homicide is significantly narrower.

The chart on the next page shows that victims of homicide are increasingly likely to be aged 30 years or younger (same for the group aged 25 years or younger), meaning that the average age of victims has decreased over the period.

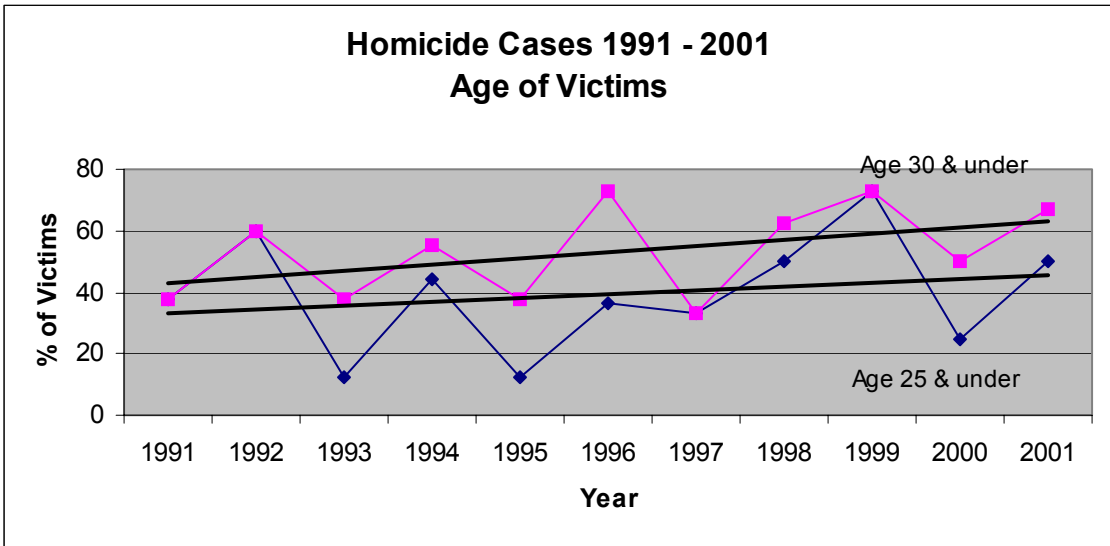


Figure 13 – Trend in Age Range of Victims

The proportion of accused persons aged 30 and under has increased slightly over the 11-year period. The same trend exists for those aged 25 and under.

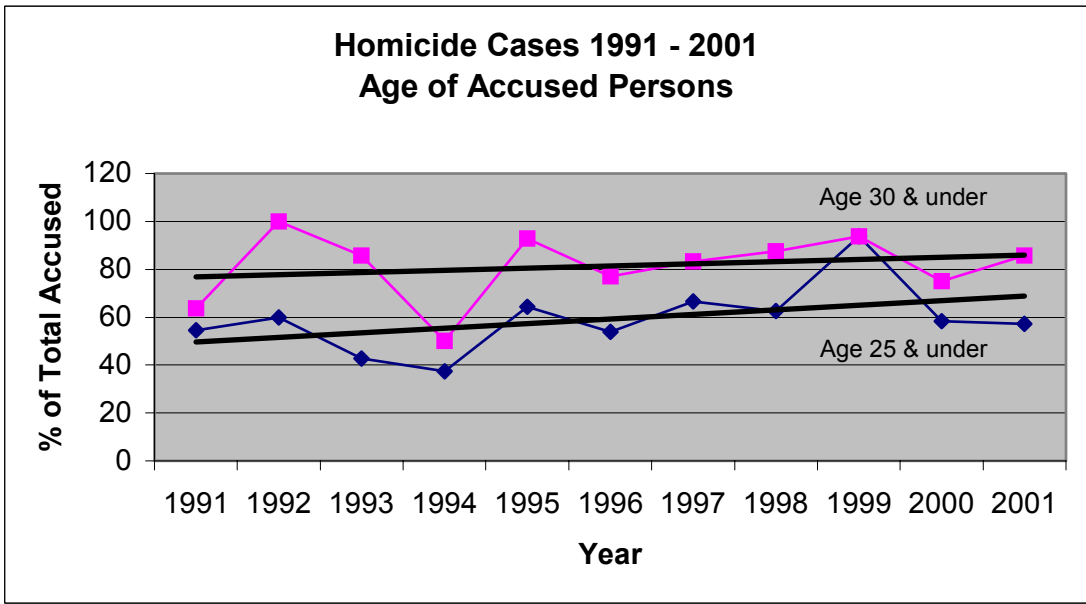


Figure 14 – Trend in Age Range of Accused Persons

4.6 Employment Status of Accused Persons

The employment status of the 114 accused persons was examined, and it was found that about $\frac{2}{3}$ were either employed or self-employed, while $\frac{1}{3}$ were unemployed. It would appear therefore, that not being gainfully employed is not a major contributing factor to committing homicide.



Figure 15 – Overall Employment Status of Accused Persons

The status of a person accused of homicide is increasingly that of a gainfully employed person, and less likely to be an unemployed person or student.

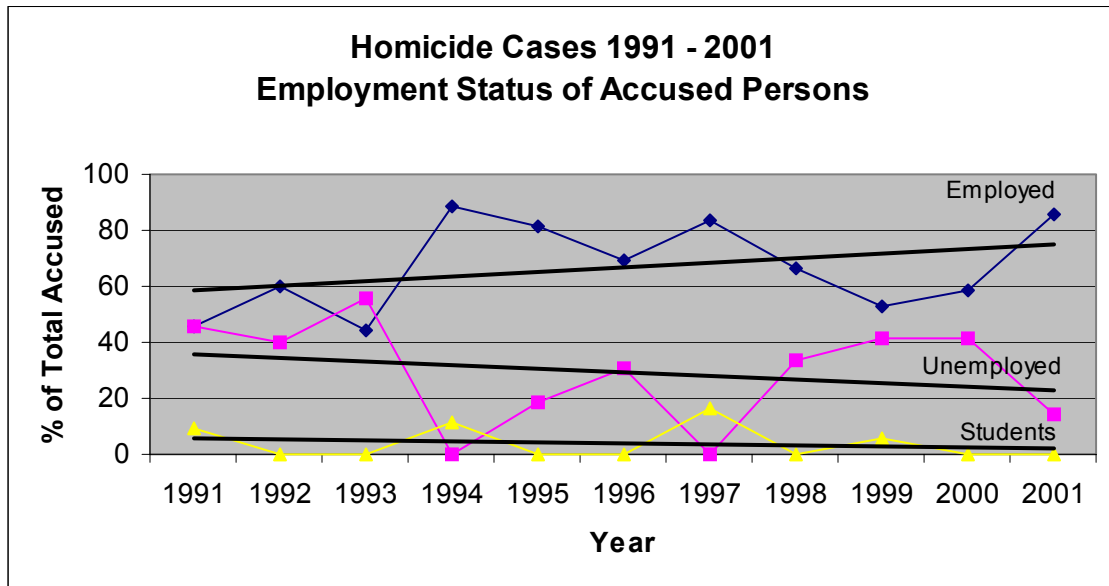


Figure 16 – Trends in Employment Status of Accused Persons

4.7 Previous Convictions of Accused Persons

Another interesting result of the analysis was that only 28% of persons accused of homicide had previous convictions, and a further 10% had charges against them but no convictions. For the majority of homicide-accused persons (62%) who had no previous convictions and no previous charges against them, the homicide was their first criminal offence. Nearly $\frac{2}{3}$ of homicides are committed by persons who are not known to the police and the courts.

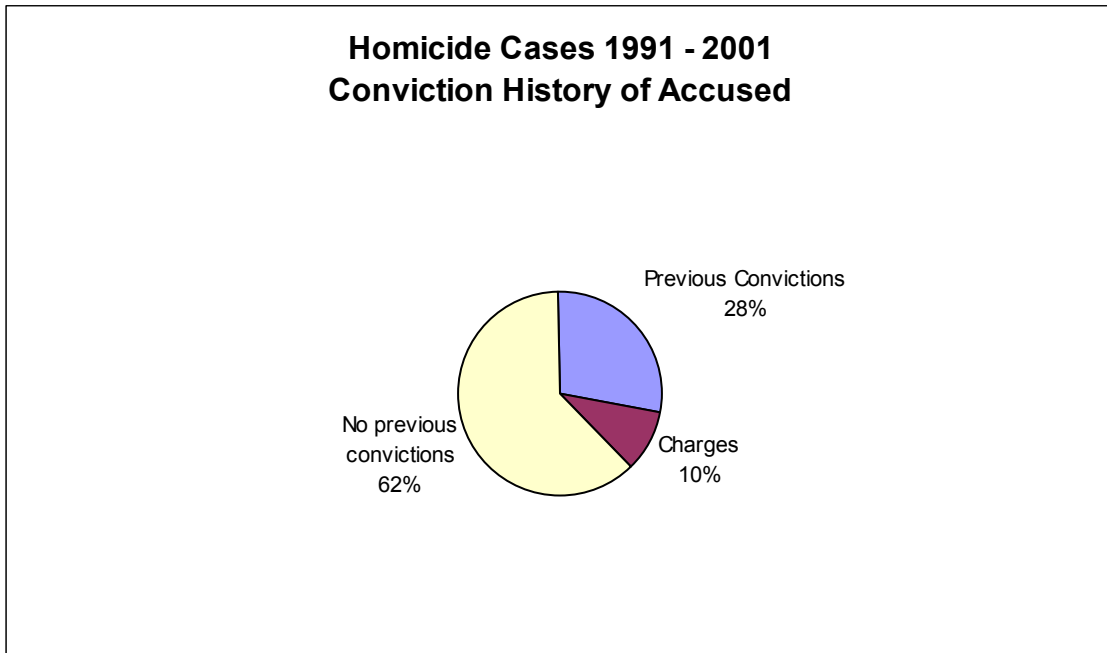


Figure 17 – Overall Conviction History of Accused Persons

Contrary to the picture given by the overall figures, the trends below show that persons accused of homicide are increasingly more likely to have previous convictions or charges.

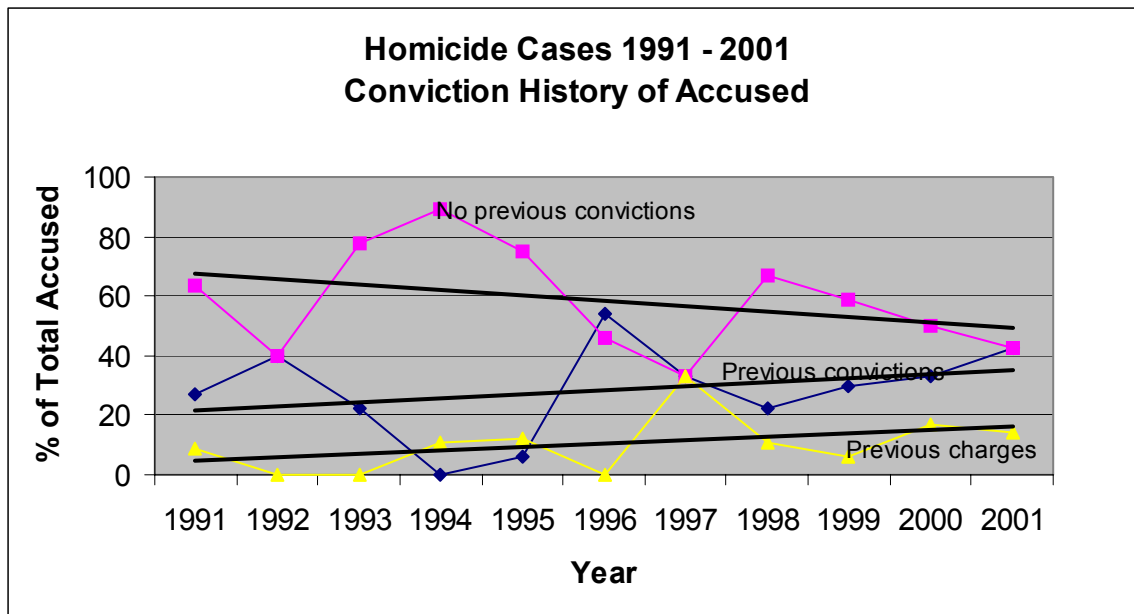


Figure 18 – Trends in Conviction History of Accused Persons

4.8 Single-Accused and Multiple-Accused Cases

It was found that the proportion of cases in which there were multiple accused persons was 16%, with an average of 3 persons per case. Overall, 38% of persons accused of homicide were involved in multiple-accused incidents. The average age of persons in multiple accused cases is 21 years, while that of persons in single accused cases is 30 years and the overall average is 26.6 years. Accused persons involved in multiple-accused homicides tend to be significantly younger than those in single-accused homicides. Of the cases studied, 71% of multiple-accused homicides were as a result of either an on going or a one-off dispute. The rest were as a result of theft, robbery or burglary.

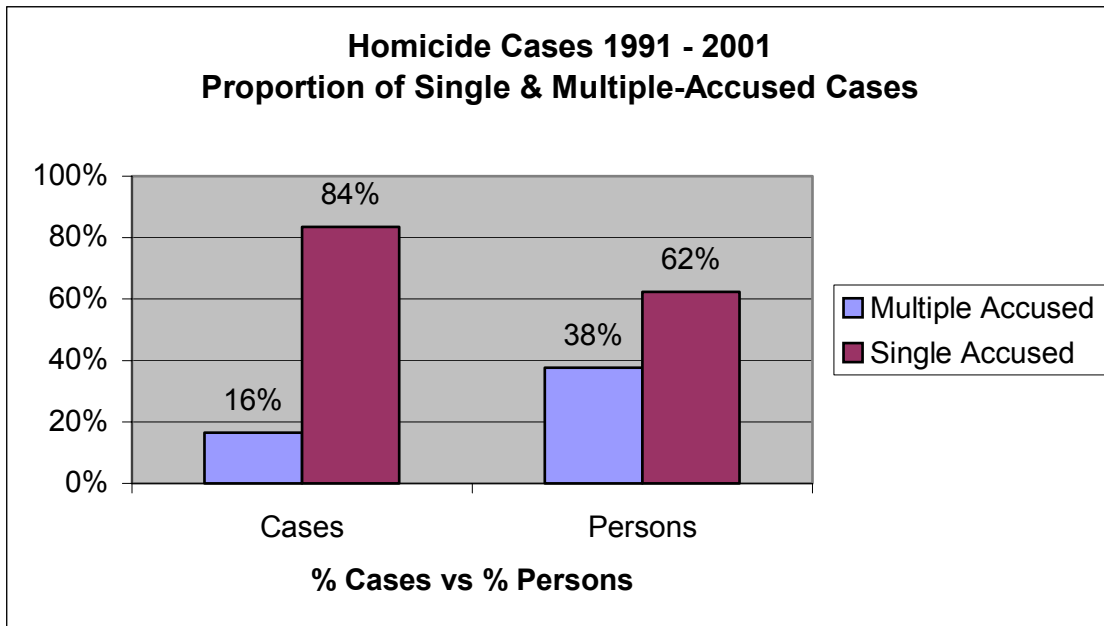


Figure 19 – Overall Single-Accused & Multiple-Accused Cases

Over the 11-year period in this study, there has been an increase in the proportion of accused persons who are involved in multiple-accused cases. This in turn would indicate that homicide cases are more likely to involve youngsters with an average age of 21 years, and trials are more likely to take longer to complete in the High court because they are multiple-accused cases.

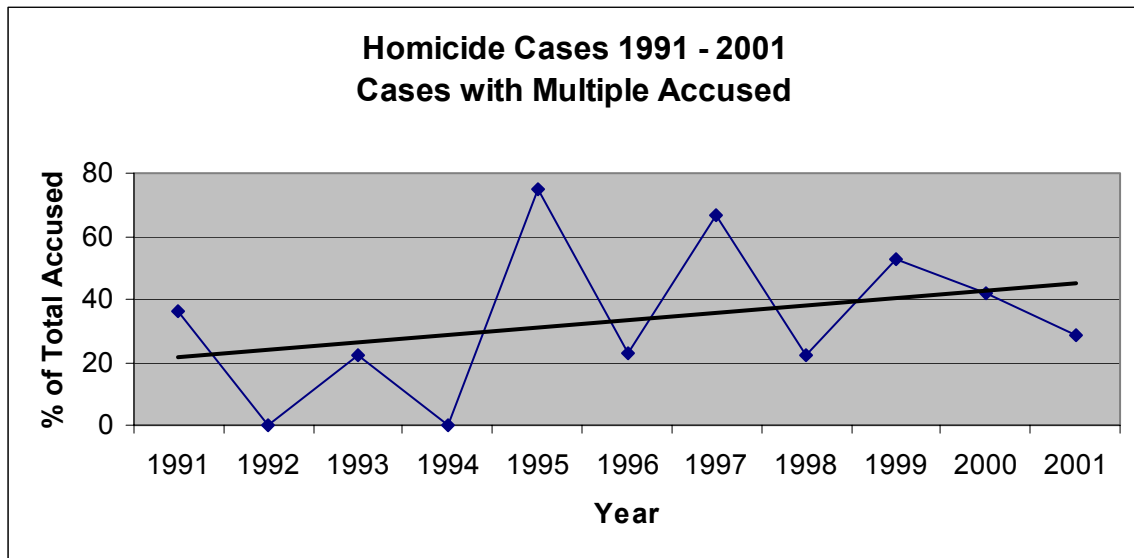


Figure 20 – Trend in Multiple-Accused Cases

4.9 Weapons Used

Just over ½ of the homicides were stabbings or chopping of the body using knives, cutlasses (“Collins” or sword), or a pair of scissors. Although the number of homicides involving a firearm was nearly half as many as those involving knives, cutlasses and scissors, it was still a significant proportion at 29% of the total. The other homicides included beatings, strangling, drowning and burning, with weapons such as sticks/pieces of wood, broken bottle, garden fork, or none at all.

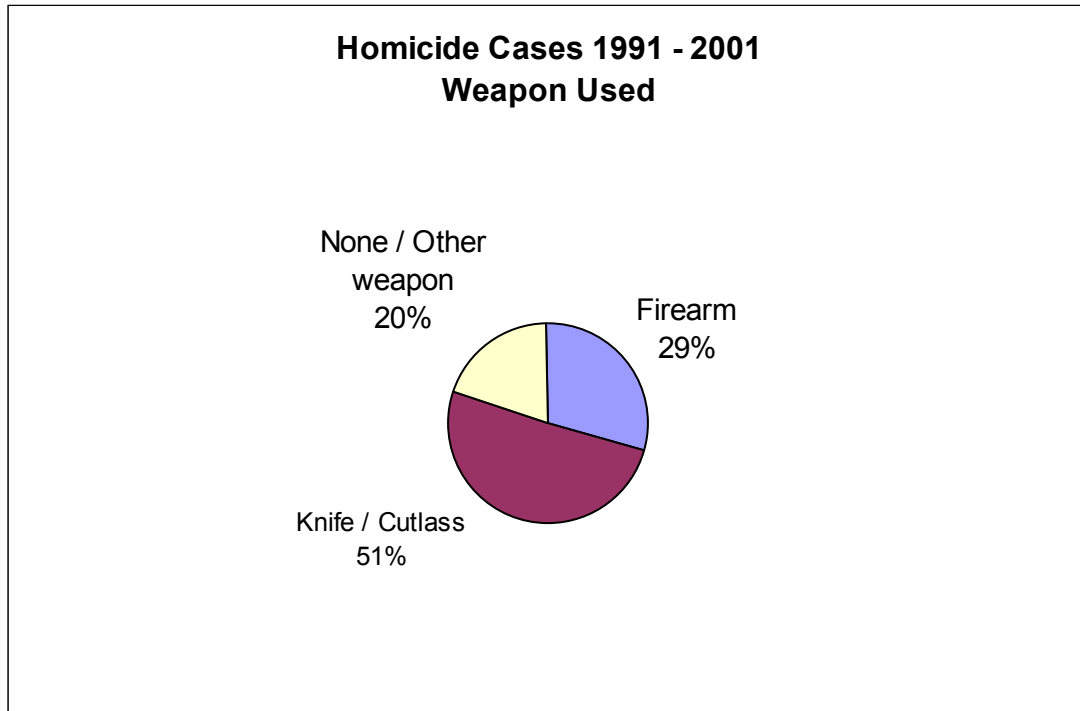


Figure 21 – Overall Weapons Used

There is an upward trend in the use of guns as homicide weapons over the period, with the trend line starting at just over 20% of total homicides and rising to approximately 35% of total homicides. Conversely, there is a slight downward trend in the use of cutlasses and knives, as well as the use of other weapons.

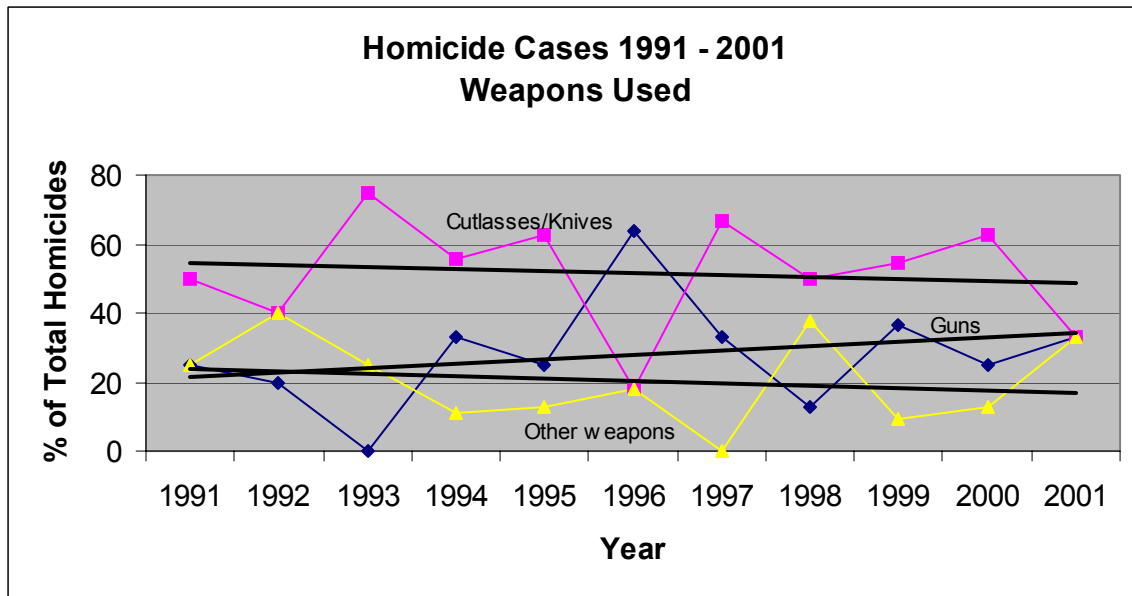


Figure 22 – Trends in Weapons Used

4.10 Summary of Findings

The findings of this research on homicide in Barbados have highlighted some of the issues that appear to be closely related to the incidences of homicide, as well as exposing some of the assumptions that may have been held traditionally on this subject. Reviewing the main findings in this paper, it can be said that young men age 30 or younger are most at risk for committing homicide, especially when they are operating in groups with other young men. It would seem that a sort of “pack mentality” may prevail, where they encourage each other to be more violent in an altercation than each individual would be if s/he were operating alone. This is the case even in small groups of 3 or 4 people, where 3 is the average number of multiple-accused for a homicide.

The most common motive by far is a dispute (63%), either on-going or a one-off dispute. The next two most common motives that account for a further 13% and 12% respectively are crimes of passion (jealousy) and crimes against property (specifically theft, robbery and burglary). It would seem that the inability to resolve disputes and manage anger is a significant factor in the number of homicides that occur in Barbados. Most of the persons accused of homicide were known to their victims (85%), which correlates well with disputes and crimes of passion being the motives for 76% of homicides. However, it should be noted that there is a downward trend in the proportion of accused persons who are known to their victims, and an upward trend in the proportion of homicides resulting from disputes.

The weapon of choice is a knife, cutlass or scissors (51%) that is used to stab or “chop” the victim about the body. The use of firearms is also significant (29%), and there is an upward trend in their use as weapons of homicide. Having such weapons to hand may increase the risk of a dispute being fatal as evidenced by the fact that fewer than 10% of the homicides in this study were the result of beatings or strangulation. Overall, neither unemployment nor previous convictions appear to have any significant correlation with persons committing homicide as 63% of accused persons are employed or self-employed, and 62% have no previous convictions or charges. However, there is an increasing proportion of accused persons who have previous convictions or charges.

5. Recommendations

In light of the above findings, there are a small number of key policies that could potentially reduce the number of homicides in Barbados considerably.

5.1 Anger Management and Dispute Resolution

The inability to manage anger and resolve disputes without violence is an important factor in the majority of homicides committed, and clearly points to the need for this trend to be arrested. There should be provision of compulsory courses, classes and counseling sessions covering these areas in schools, community centers, parenting organizations, youth groups and so on, available to people from primary school age right through to adulthood. This would, over time, create a culture of reasoning with each other and resolving disagreements peacefully. It is a long-term strategy requiring patience and perseverance, but it would have lasting results as people learn skills to keep their anger under control and pass these on to others.

5.2 Positive Male Role Models

Approximately 16% of homicides are committed by groups of young people (mainly boys/men), whose average age is 21 years. Identifying the natural leaders in groups of young men and targeting them with programmes that teach, encourage and nurture constructive behaviour and inspire them to act as positive role models may help to reduce the incidence of such multiple-accused homicides. The young men in multiple-accused homicides seem to respond to peer pressure and are persuaded to commit acts of violence with their peers that they would not usually commit on their own. Only 14% of persons accused of homicides in cases with multiple accused have previous convictions. This is half of the rate of previous convictions in the overall group of persons accused of homicides.

5.3 Tougher Restrictions on Knives, Cutlasses and Firearms

The use of weapons such as knives and cutlasses in fatal attacks points to the need to have tough restrictions on the carrying of such implements. Obviously this would not eliminate such attacks in homes, farms and other places where there are legitimate uses for these tools or weapons. There are already some restrictions on carrying knives and cutlasses in public places without prescribed protective cases and specific, legitimate reasons for carrying them, and persons found carrying them may be charged with possession of an offensive weapon. However, they are still used in at least half of the homicides that occur, which would indicate that more stringent restrictions may be required.

Firearms are already very restricted by law, but are used in 29% of homicides. This would indicate the need for a stronger crackdown on the possession of illegal firearms.

6. Conclusions

There are some very clear conclusions from this study on homicide in Barbados over the 11-year period from 1991 to 2001. The principal conclusion is that the major cause of homicides is disputes, either on-going or one-off disputes, and this must be addressed by providing the general population (but especially young men 30 years old or younger) with the skills they need to manage their anger and resolve disputes without resorting to violence.

A major objective of this study was to examine the relationship between the victim and the accused person(s). It was found that in 85% of homicides, the accused person was known to the victim. This supports the principal finding stated above that the major cause of homicides is disputes between the accused and the victim. However, even though there is an upward trend in homicides resulting from disputes, there is a downward trend in the proportion of accused persons who are known to their victims.

Young men 30 years old or younger (average age 26.6, median age 24) are most at risk for committing homicides (75%), and to a lesser extent for being the victims of homicide (57%). They are also more likely to carry out such acts of violence when they are in groups of 3 or 4 persons. This age group should therefore be a primary target for any initiatives that are taken to reduce violence and by extension, homicides. The specific nurturing of positive male role models may be explored as a way to reduce the incidence of multiple-accused homicides.

Weapons are used in most cases of homicides, with knives, cutlasses, scissors and firearms making up 80% of homicide weapons. Tougher restrictions on carrying any of these implements or weapons in public places may assist in reducing the ease of availability of homicide weapons, and therefore help to avoid violent disputes becoming fatal.

Finally, a rather surprising finding of this study was that most persons who are accused of homicide are neither unemployed nor have any previous convictions or charges against them, although the trend is increasing for accused persons having previous convictions or charges.