



Progress Report '12

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Data-Sharing by the Center for Homicide Research of U.S. Homicide Data

Sharing data to provide for mutual verification is the foundation of scientific research.

“...Reproducibility is essential for confidence in social scientific results. Since the simplest test of reproducibility is reanalysis by another researcher, the homicide data used to support our conclusions ought to be available for others to examine.”

Roland Chilton

The Center for Homicide Research shares data with qualified individuals and organizations at no cost to the requestor.

Research data is compiled by the Center to create specialized databases or subsets of data called datasets. Researchers also share existing data from various locations on the internet, especially public lists or tabulations of homicides from around the United States. The essence of this data is formulated into datasheets suitable for easy analysis. The presence of victim names allows researchers to arrange for additional records on each homicide incident. Topics range from taxi driver homicides to suitcase body disposals.

Each year Center Staff is contacted by graduate level students seeking data for research projects or dissertation study. Individuals must meet professional criteria set out by the Principal Researcher including that the student be enrolled in an educational program of study. In some cases independent researchers not part of a program are also considered, as are law enforcement, crime analysts, and news journalists.

The requestor should be able to show that they have the knowledge and capability to analyze and interpret the

Data intelligently and cautiously taking into account all the advantages and shortcomings of the dataset. Data is granted on a case-by-case basis. Data with all identifiers are available to law enforcement agencies. Commercial use is not authorized.

To be considered for data-sharing, a research proposal must be submitted to the Principal Researcher explaining the planned analysis. Proposals need not be long, but ought to be well thought out. Once approved, the requestor must submit a signed contract (provided by the Center), which lays out the agreement regarding restrictions on data use. This agreement is provided by Center staff to help ensure security and confidentiality of any sensitive data. Access to foundational data (i.e., the actual reports) is rare, though sometimes available.

Format of the data varies and comes in Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Access, or IBM SPSS. Coding sheets or codebooks are provided, as is data documentation. Many of the datasets come with the victim's name, and in some instances, an offender name. This facilitates the collection of further records through data-linking.

Data that is available from some other source, such as ICPSR (Inter-University Consortium on Political and Social Research) should be obtained from that source first. Non-Center for Homicide Research datasets or lists are publicly available compilations of data and, for the purpose of research, are available under *fair use* of the copyright law.

For additional information on our data-sharing program or to request data, visit www.homicidecenter.org.

POSING OF HUMAN REMAINS

Beginning in spring of 2011, researchers at the Center began the grizzly task of examining and analyzing hundreds of photographs of dead bodies. The goal was to better identify the positions in which the bodies were arranged, but also to establish a set of criteria to help investigators articulate what makes them think that posing was an intentional part of the killing.

Research intern Raquel Halfdahl, of Washington State, obtained nearly 500 photographs for her analysis. She systematically categorized over two dozen pieces of information from each photograph and entered it into a database. The detail of these observations was impressive. Even the angles of a victim's legs were measured using a protractor.

Images were then divided into classes of posed, or non-posed, and the criteria for that determination were decided upon. As you can imagine, this was not a comfortable process. Many breaks were needed and frequent debriefings occurred in an effort to maintain sanity. Needless to say, most people could not have done what Halfdahl did. What she did was amazing and we should all thank her for it.

Researchers then evaluated the clusters of photographs. Eventually staff noticed that of the images appearing posed, and which fit the objective criteria, visual patterns were emerging. Two basic sets of posed images included those in which body parts were arranged, and those in which certain treatments were applied to the body or remains. Results of this research were presented at a conference on sexual homicide in Binghamton, NY last November.

ALUMNI REPORT

The Center's Internship Academy and Summer Internship Institute is the backbone of the Center's research staff. Over the years our students have migrated up the ladder reaching far into the community.

- Christopher Shad interned during 2006 and again in 2007 as a University of Minnesota Community Scholar's Engagement Program participant. After several other related internships, Shad has been hired by Interpol (International Police) and is working at an undisclosed location abroad.
- Erica (Keiter) Spenningsby, who interned during summer of 2009, graduated Hamline Law School with a J.D. She is currently working at Robert Half Legal as an account manager.
- Seth Cobin graduated law school and is a practicing defense attorney in downtown Minneapolis. He now serves on the Center's Board.
- Tom Nerison has been hired as a patrol officer by the New Brighton City Police Department. Nerison was an intern during spring of 2008.

STUDENT ALUMS RECONNECT

In looking toward the future, the Center is seeking to reconnect with former student interns and service-learners. The Center has hosted over 350 students since the Student Internship Academy began in the spring of 2004. Former student interns know more about the Center than almost anyone due to their hands-on role in the day-to-day operations. As they move out into the community it is likely they will become ambassadors for the Center and its mission.

Center Staff is updating contact information on all past students in hopes of organizing occasional social networking events. Our students are now spread far and wide. Many are already working in their chosen occupation. It is our hope that they assist in spreading the word that homicide is preventable.

DEVELOPMENT OFFICER PROFILE: JOHN CZYSCON

The Center is sad to announce that Stephen Schreiber, our first part-time Development Officer has moved on to full-time employment elsewhere. Stephen joined the Center in the fall of 2011 and has been a valued part of our team; his talents and commitment to the Center will be missed.

With Stephen's departure, the Center is very pleased to announce that John Czyncon has accepted the role of Development Officer. Thanks to Stephen, the transition was extremely smooth with a little overlap. John started in mid-February and will be responsible for creating and overseeing the Center's fundraising strategy and will be working with Principal Researcher Dallas Drake to continue to grow the Center in a sustainable manner.



John is skilled in financial development, constituent relations and event planning and has experience in database management, communications and maintaining financial records. Prior to accepting the Development Officer position, John served as Membership and Event Coordinator with OutFront Minnesota and has worked and volunteered with several area nonprofit organizations.

If you have an interest in volunteering in our Development Office or if you would like to meet about a giving opportunity, please do not hesitate to contact John at (612) 331-4820 or john.czyncon@homicidecenter.org.

INTERN PROFILE: JOSH LEIS

Josh Leis came to the Center to participate in the Center's Internship Academy in the fall of 2011. Currently a Junior at the University of Minnesota, Leis is majoring in Political Science with a focus in International Affairs and Criminal Justice. In addition, Leis is studying linguistics, Russian and Arabic.



Leis's array of academic studies brings a broad skill set and multi-disciplinary thought that is helpful as a homicide researcher. His focus on international affairs and criminal justice has afforded him a range of analytical tools that provide him with the ability to understand intricate relationships and approach such relationships from a variety of angles of investigation and thought.

Through my educational pursuits, I have tried to explore how different studies may lend themselves to examining the relationships in our world. Languages showed me how culture and language can interact with one another to form different structures and expectations. Studying political science has helped me examine the choices, motives and rules society lives by. Leis explained.

With this accumulation of tools from his academic studies, Leis's unique and flexible perspective has been extremely valuable as he has been working toward establishing a scientific definition of *execution-style homicide*, a project that he manages. Many cases of LGBT homicide involve execution. Leis plans to publish his research on this difficult topic of homicide in the near future.

Despite fulfilling his 160 hour requirement this Spring, Leis continues to volunteer his time and talents to advance the Center's charge of promoting greater knowledge and understanding of the unique nature of homicide. 

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The Center for Homicide Research is an independent, volunteer-driven, non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the capacity of the community, criminal justice professionals, and law enforcement to become more effective in identifying, solving and preventing homicide.

First founded in 1999 as a nonprofit organization to research LGBT homicide, the name was changed in 2004 to the Center for Homicide Research, and its mission expanded in 2007 to include all types of homicide, with a focus on marginalized communities and underrepresented areas of homicide.

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The Center's groundbreaking research and services rely on the generosity of community members like you who share the belief that HOMICIDE IS PREVENTABLE...

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* Indicates multiple contributions

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