



Progress Report 2015

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Auto-theft Following Homicide

The Center has initiated a study on the theft of a motor vehicle immediately following a homicide. The project was prompted by findings in the National Database which indicated that theft of a victim's vehicle occurred in up to 36% of LGBT homicide cases!

A literature review revealed that little or no prior information had been published on this subject. Center interns took steps to become experts in this field with the intent to aid law enforcement in a more rapid discovery of the victim's vehicle - found to be a critical evidentiary element in these types of homicides.

Motor vehicle theft during a homicide incident is theorized as a "crossover" crime. In other words, a violent crime and a property crime occur together in the same incident and so the offender is said to cross over.

Interns, led by Michael Becker, collected nearly 100 cases in a short period of time. Following the coding and analysis of the data, it was found that these cases follow important trends that could be invaluable to a homicide investigation. Much to our surprise, up to 80% of these cases could be characterized as sex-related homicides. The implication being that it was no accident that motor vehicle theft was present in so many of the LGBT National Database homicide incidents. Cases further separated based on the number of offenders in an incident, offender gender, and the varying criminal histories that each offender had beforehand.

Becker is in the process of finalizing this report after which it will be presented in Clearwater, Florida at the Homicide Research Working Group, Summer Meeting. This should help strengthen its findings with expert feedback, after which it can be submitted for magazine and journal publication. 

Hennepin County Medical Examiners' Research Collaboration

Center staff has successfully negotiated access to historical death and autopsy records of the Hennepin County Medical Examiners' Office. This is thanks in large part to Dr. Andrew Baker, their Chief Medical Examiner.

Identification of homicide cases is often achieved using journalistic reports. This is later followed up with official accounts such as are found in police reports, court records, death certificates, and even autopsy reports. Official records are typically difficult to access and sometimes quite expensive, costing hundreds of dollars per record.

Inquiries were made with the Chief Medical Examiner whether historical homicide records that might be used to establish pre-1960s homicide rates in Minneapolis. An offer was then made by Baker that Center staff could access any case records up to 1984. After that year, all records are still protected under a "thirty-year rule" that prevents public access. All medical examiner records are considered evidentiary and may be used in criminal prosecutions. Therefore, access to the records vault is highly restricted due to evidence chain of custody practices. Access was further supported in that all Center interns pass background investigations through the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, as well as internal checks. Student researchers will be locked into the vault to do their work and work under the supervision of assistant medical examiner, Dr. Joan Jung.

Center staff will be systematically collecting data from these records beginning with 1906. The first homicide cluster in Minneapolis appeared in the Near-

North Community in summer of 1961. Researchers are attempting to show that this was the first and only homicide cluster in Minneapolis—that it was not a re-emergence of a previously established homicide problem. Staff will also be digitizing records of LGBT homicide deaths.

Thanks to this collaboration, there is no cost associated with records acquisition. Instead, our interns will be providing a service to the medical examiners' office in that they will concurrently construct an index to these earlier records. 

Software Helps Research Homicide Patterns

Research work has come a long way in the past few years. The Center routinely employs a variety of software to assist in analyzing trends and patterns in homicide perpetration.

Like with most agencies, our researchers use programs within Microsoft Office™ such as Excel™ and Access™ databases, but at an advanced level. We use PaperPort™ 14 by Nuance Communications for digital collection and manipulation of foundational data.

Our data analysis software includes PSPP, a freeware version of SPSS™ (and with somewhat less functionality). SPSS stands for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and is now marketed by IBM Corporation. User licenses per computer cost about \$2,300 each. PSPP's programming was composed by the same author as SPSS, but made available for FREE with the stipulation that no one ever be allowed to sell it.

One software emerging in greater usage is Stata™. Our most recent quote for a single user license is \$3,990, well out of our range of a small nonprofit.

Spatial analysis of homicide is completed using our ESRI ArcMap™ software. This is available at \$7,000 per user license. Some software is available through a nonprofit buying consortium and so we have the ArcMap software for approximately \$200, though without some of the necessary operating components. This lower cost is due to companies receiving tax deductions for their donation. Few copies are made available however. They are available first come-first serve. Some components are never available.

On occasion we also use a special version of Microsoft PowerPoint™. This software add-on allows for the production of professional-looking time-lines as are commonly used in Serial Crime Incident Analysis.

Homicide research requires a considerable investment. Our organization is dependent on thoughtful decision-making combined with the generous support of our many individual donors to help make this work happen. 

International Student Researchers at CHR

Although student researchers at the Center routinely come from a wide variety of educational backgrounds and geographic locations, this year our Summer Internship Institute sports students from even more diverse backgrounds.

This summer brings us Kassie Simpkins majoring in Criminology and Criminal Justice undergraduate student at Griffith University, Bilambil Heights, Australia. She previously attended the prestigious Australian Institute of Criminology Student Forum in 2014 in Canberra. Julian Martin Irigoyen, of Argentina, will be joining us from Washington and Lee University in Virginia. He will be specializing in GIS, or the spatial analysis of homicide. Inna Telkova emigrated from Russia. She studies writing and literature at North Central University in Minneapolis. She also has worked as a loss-prevention officer at Valley Fair in Shakopee.

Over the last five years, the Center has sponsored undergraduate and graduate students from many area colleges and universities, including St. Mary's University-Winona, Macalester College, University of St. Thomas, Hamline University, Mitchell-Hamline, School of Law, Metro State University, University of Minnesota Law School, University of Minnesota-Duluth, Augsburg College, Century College, Brown College, Normandale Community College, North Hennepin Community College, University of North Dakota, North Central University and the University of Minnesota.

Students have also come from educational institutions in other regions including: University of Wyoming (Laramie), Nebraska Wesleyan University, University of Wisconsin (River Falls), University of Rochester (New York), Marymount University (Washington DC area), Yale University (New Haven, CT), Tiffin University (Ohio), University of Durham (England), and St. Petersburg State Agricultural University (Russia), Eisner Institute for Professional Studies (student in Johannesburg, South Africa), and a University of Minnesota student having returned to Indonesia. Some foreign student placements operate via Skype™. 

Intern Profile: Jisi Chen

Jisi Chen came to the Center in October of 2014 as a statistics major at the University of Minnesota. Originally from Canton, China, she hopes to become a business or marketing Data Analyst some day.

Chen's work at the Center focused primarily on the spatial analysis of homicide using Arcmap™ crime-mapping technology. However, at the time Chen joined the center, she did not have any crime-mapping or GIS technology background. On her first day of training, she worked to develop a theoretical understanding of the spatial analysis of homicides. She also had to learn about addressing structures and database development. Chen had her first experience getting to know the crime mapping technology and she immediately knew that she had an interest in learning this advanced new skill.

Chen's supervisor led her to use ESRI ArcMap™ crime-mapping technology, and he gave her many useful trainings and opportunities for practice. Chen says she discovered that what she thought was a simple mapping technology is more influential and powerful than she expected. She also said that now she realizes the benefits of GIS (Global Information Systems) map-making and that small efforts can lead to a larger benefit for communities seeking to prevent homicide.

"Making a homicide map is not easy," Chen said. "It has to be accurate and fully labeled." She did have some challenging times and confusions when she was mapping, but overall said she enjoyed the process of meeting new difficulties and solving problems.

"Interning at the Center has been a great experience," Chen said. Chen has learned so many things such as address geo-coding, map production, team project participation, and of course--homicide. She considered this internship as a valuable experience and she believes that it provided a great learning background for her future career wherever it takes her. 

The Center has received a \$40,000 gift from the Alan Braun Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation. While the donation of every one of our supporters is crucial to our mission, this gift will go a long way to ensuring our work continues. Braun has contributed several major gifts over the past few years.

Diversity of funding is an absolute necessity. The IRS looks at how much money is given, but also, by how many individuals. Every gift counts, no matter the size.

Investing in research leads to development of the knowledge base, and in turn systemic change. While this is a slow process, the changes it creates are increasingly permanent. We thank Alan Braun for this important gift.

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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.

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