DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE POLICE

STUDIES IN DETROIT AND KANSAS CITY

DETROIT

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FOREWORD

It is easy to feel helpless when thinking about assaults and homicides. The United States has had for perhaps a century or more a higher rate of individual violence than have most European nations. Since the early 1960s, that rate has increased dramatically despite general social progress and widespread expressions of concern by various national commissions.

Most people are aware, and this study confirms, that the great majority of assaults and homicides occur among friends, relatives, and acquaintances. Although this fact is perhaps reassuring to those persons who believe that they have only peaceable associates, it adds to the general sense of helplessness. If violence occurs disproportionately in intimate settings, how can the government, and the police in particular, intervene so as to reduce the number of disputes in which force, and sometimes fatal force, is employed? How, indeed, are the police even to obtain timely warning of the locations where violence is likely to occur? And if they have such warning, what are they to do?

This study, carried out by the police departments of Detroit and Kansas City, provides preliminary answers to some of these questions and indicates, more clearly than ever, the need for further efforts to explore, in an experimental

and carefully evaluated manner, other ways of reducing the chance that a dispute will lead to an assault and an assault to a homicide. The study suggests, among other things, that the characteristics of persons who engage in nonviolent disturbances are different from those of persons involved in violent fights. Perhaps most striking, it finds—at least in Kansas City—that the police can obtain some early warning of assaults and homicides. The police in that city were called to the location of an assault or homicide at least once before in about 85 percent of the cases and five or more times in 50 percent of the cases. In short, any given assault or homicide arrest is likely to be the culmination of a series of police interventions.

This study does not test methods of handling those interventions so as to minimize the chances that subsequent assaults and homicides will occur. As the authors of the report point out, that is the obvious next step. There are several possibilities. One is to build upon the "family crisis intervention unit" strategy pioneered by Dr. Morton Bard and the New York City Police Department. Unfortunately, we still do not have enough tested experience with this technique of trained dispute settlement to know the extent to which it can reduce subsequent violent behavior as opposed to simply providing a useful way for cooling off the disputants momentarily.

Another possibility is to reassess the way in which the arrest and prosecution of assault cases are handled. Every police officer is all too familiar with current practice: When an arrest for a familial or nonstranger assault is made, it is followed, in the majority of cases, by the victim being unwilling to prosecute, and thus the charges being dropped, or, if prosecution occurs, only minor penalties being imposed. The Vera Institute of Justice's recent study of a sample of criminal cases in the New York City courts found that more than half the nonstranger assault cases were dismissed; of those that resulted in conviction, none produced a prison term of a year or more.

There are several ways of interpreting such facts. One, now widely accepted, is that a nonstranger assault is essentially a private dispute that, barring *very* serious injury, the disputants should be allowed to resolve privately, with arrests being used only as a temporary order-maintenance strategy. Another view, however, is that the community has a vital stake in even familial violence and that some significant penalty should be imposed by the criminal justice system in these cases even if the victim is reluctant to prosecute. Still another view is that while the criminal justice system ought to intervene, it ought to have a wider array of dispositional choices than simply the alternatives: jail or "a walk." At present we lack any reliable information as to the consequences of following these different approaches. Gathering such information in a systematic and objective manner ought to be a high-priority concern of local police and prosecutors.

Familial violence is not the whole story, however. As the Detroit study makes clear, a large proportion of homicides and assaults involve strangers or at least persons who are not relatives. And other studies have revealed an ominous increase in the number and proportion of nonfamilial assaults and murders. In a part of Harlem, for example, the percentage of homicides that are premeditated rather than passionate or spontaneous increased from 16 percent in 1968 to 46 percent in 1974. Another study in Chicago suggests that felony murders (i.e., murders that take place in the course of another crime, such as robbery) are increasing faster than homicides generally.

In 1975, the homicide rate in many large cities decreased, in some places substantially. Obviously this is a welcome change, but it is not yet clear whether it is a permanent one. In any event, we should not clutch at straws: Whatever short-term changes in rates of violence may occur, homicide remains the second most common cause of death for young persons and has doubled in rate in the last twenty years, despite improvements in medical technology that have kept more assault victims alive than once was the case. The studies

reported on in this publication are written in detached, scientific language, but they refer, not simply to statistics, but to countless human tragedies.

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researchers for both the projects are also indebted to many individuals who cannot be listed separately here.

Special thanks must go to the police administrators who saw the importance of the research and supported their personnel in their work: former Police Commissioner John Nichols and former Chief of Police Philip G. Tannian of Detroit, and former Chiefs of Police Clarence M. Kelley and Joseph D. McNamara of Kansas City.

Appreciation is particularly extended to Patricia Fox, who studied all the materials now summarized in this monograph and compiled them in one document, and to Mara Adams of the Police Foundation for her careful editing of this report.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

By far the largest number of homicides result from an argument between two people who know each other well. Husbands kill unfaithful wives. Friends kill friends who don't pay bets. Sons kill fathers who come home drunk and beat their wives. These are usually unpremeditated acts, committed in the heat of passion, out of police view. For every homicide of this type, there are many more aggravated assaults that result in injury and hospitalization.

Surveys consistently show that disputes or disturbances are the largest single category of calls that most police departments receive. Also, as potential homicide and assault producers, these situations are dangerous not only to the participants: More assaults on police officers occur during response to disturbance calls than in any other area of police work. During 1975, disturbance calls accounted for 28 percent of assaults on police officers, and attempting arrests other than burglary or robbery accounted for another 22 percent of the assaults. In addition, more than 15 percent of the law enforcement officers killed in 1975 were responding to disturbance calls.[1] There is some evidence that the way in

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1. FBI Uniform Crime Reports, *Crime in the United States—1975*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976, 231, 225.

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which a police officer handles a disturbance has some effect on whether the officer is injured. An analysis by Hans Toch showed that the most frequently cited reason for attacks against officers in San Francisco was that the officer touched or threatened the suspect.[2]

Police methods of responding to disputes and disturbances have been undergoing a change in recent years. In the past, despite the evident danger to both participants and police, many police officers did not consider intervention in these situations to be "real" police work. Police policy reinforced these attitudes. According to the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice:

> The organization of police departments and the training of policemen are focused almost entirely on the apprehension and prosecution of criminals. What a policeman does, or should do, instead of making an arrest, or in a situation in which he may not make an arrest, is rarely discussed. The peacemaking and service activities, which consume the majority of police time, receive too little consideration.[3]

Since 1967, the date of the Commission's report, there has been a considerable increase in emphasis given to the service and order maintenance roles of the police. As part of this change, many departments have experimented with crisis intervention programs in which police are trained to defuse conflict situations.

According to an evaluation of one such program, "policemen, even when randomly selected, can learn and practice relevant interpersonal skills to affect their performance as conflict managers." Some of the changes brought about, according to the evaluation, were that:

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2. Hans Toch, *Violent Men*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1969, 39.

3. President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967, 92.

(1) the officers were better able to regard both parties in conflict as contributing to the situation rather than to see the dispute as the responsibility of one 'crazy person'; (2) the officers were able to maintain objectivity in the way they perceived the conflict; (3) the response toward the police of those in conflict was positive; (4) there was little evidence of the need to employ force; (5) there was absence of injuries to officers; (6) the officers more frequently employed techniques other than arrest and/or court referral.[4]

An important element in devising methods of dealing with disputes is to identify which situations have a high potential for violence. For several years, researchers have been trying to discern patterns in homicides and other crimes. The first major study was conducted by Marvin Wolfgang, who analyzed 588 homicides that occurred in Philadelphia between January 1, 1948, and December 31, 1953.[5] He studied where and when these crimes were committed, the weapons used, the characteristics and relationships of both victims and offenders, the circumstances of the crime, the motives involved, and other factors. Since that study, many other researchers have performed similar analyses in other cities.[6] In 1969, the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, using Wolfgang's method, analyzed data from 17 cities across the nation, focusing on all four major violent crimes. The Commission published a prelimi-

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4. Morton Bard, *Family Crisis Intervention: From Concept to Implementation*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973, 5.

5. Marvin E. Wolfgang, *Patterns in Criminal Homicide*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1958.

6. Among the studies that deal with homicide and aggravated assault are A. Pokorny, "A Comparison of Homicides in Two Cities," *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 56, 1965, 479-87; H. L. Voss and J. R. Hepburn, "Patterns in Criminal Homicide in Chicago," *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 59, 1968, 449-508; and D. Pittman and W. Handy, "Patterns in Criminal Aggravated Assault," *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science* 55, 1964, 462-70.

nary analysis of this material; Lynn Curtis, assistant director of that effort, later published an expanded version.[7]

Although separated in time and conducted in a variety of cities, most of the findings of the studies dealing with homicide and aggravated assault are remarkably similar and have been helpful to police departments in recognizing when and how to intervene in conflicts.

To improve police understanding of these potentially dangerous situations, the Police Foundation recently funded two studies dealing with the relationship of disputes and disturbances to aggravated assaults and homicides. Although each of these studies had a slightly different perspective and somewhat differing reasons for being, each confirms much of what is already known about conflict violence and each also expands this body of knowledge in important ways.

Detroit. The first project is a study conducted by the Detroit Police Department; researchers were G. Marie Wilt, Ph.D., formerly a research associate in the Office for Institutional Research at Wayne State University, and James D. Bannon, formerly a division commander with the Detroit Police Department.[8] The goal of the study, entitled "Conflict-Motivated Homicides and Assaults in Detroit," was to learn as much as possible about the participants in and characteristics of homicides and assaults to determine whether some of these crimes can be prevented. As defined by the researchers, conflict-motivated homicides and aggravated assaults are those that are not associated with the commission of another crime (such as robbery); they generally begin as verbal disputes and almost always involve persons who know each other.

The study had two phases. For the homicide phase, the researchers analyzed all homicides that occurred in Detroit in 1972, focusing primarily on the ones designated as conflict-motivated. For the assault phase, the researchers gathered

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7. Lynn A. Curtis, *Criminal Violence*, Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1974.

8. Dr. Wilt is currently Chief of the Evaluation Unit of the Michigan Cancer Foundation. James Bannon is now Executive Deputy Chief of the Detroit Police Department.

data from police files on assaults that occurred in Detroit between 1971 and 1973. In addition, they conducted interviews with persons involved in 144 conflict-motivated assaults that took place in the last two weeks in October and the first two weeks of November 1973. For both phases of the study the researchers attempted to discover characteristics of the victims, the offenders, the situations of the crimes, and the nature of the conflicts that preceded them.

Kansas City. The second project, entitled "Domestic Violence and the Police," was conducted by the Northeast Patrol Division Task Force of the Kansas City, Mo., Police Department; researchers were Ronald K. Breedlove, John W. Kennish, Donald M. Sandker, and Robert K. Sawtell, with the assistance of Charles Key. All are members of the department. The project was undertaken, as was the Detroit study, to question the long-standing axiom that homicides and assaults are not preventable by police action. An important goal was to explore the relationship between domestic disturbances and homicides and aggravated assaults, to determine whether police could intervene effectively at the disturbance stage before a homicide or assault occurs.

The project gathered and analyzed several types of data including:

- The arrest records of homicide and assault participants for 1970 and 1971;
- The number of police responses to disturbance calls at addresses of homicide and assault participants within the previous two years;
- The characteristics of homicides, aggravated assaults, and participants, based on data compiled from:
  - A Disturbance Profile Card, filled out by officers responding to domestic disturbances;
  - Onsite disturbance interviews, used to collect information on domestic disturbances;
  - Background interviews, conducted by project personnel with participants in homicides, aggravated assaults, and disturbances to learn about personal backgrounds and to compare the circumstances surrounding the incidents.

This Report

Because the data in the two projects overlap and because many of the findings confirm the results of past studies, the Police Foundation decided not to publish each study separately, although the complete reports of both may be obtained upon request. Rather, foundation staff have prepared this report that places the findings of the two studies into the overall context of what is already known about homicides and aggravated assaults and that summarizes and highlights the new material from each study.

CHAPTER II

A PROFILE OF CONFLICT-MOTIVATED HOMICIDES AND AGGRAVATED ASSAULTS[9]

During 1975, there were an estimated 20,510 murders[10] and 484,710 aggravated assaults reported to the police in the United States. Information provided by police agencies to the

9. The term "conflict-motivated" is drawn from the Detroit study, where it refers to homicides and assaults that are not associated with the commission of another crime and that usually involve persons who know each other, although this is not invariably the case. The term encompasses violence, including domestic violence, that grows out of a conflict involving two or more people. Other types of crime include crime-related, group, or random. Crime-related homicides or assaults are those that occur incidental to the commission of another crime, such as robbery. A group homicide or assault would involve a teenage or other gang or group. Random homicides or assaults take place when one or more assailants injure or kill another person for no apparent reason.

10. The term "murder," or "murder and nonnegligent manslaughter," is defined by the FBI Uniform Crime Reports as follows: "All willful and felonious homicides as distinguished from deaths caused by negligence. Excludes attempts to kill, assaults to kill, suicides, accidental deaths, or justifiable homicides." It comprises part (a) of the Part I offense of criminal homicide; part (b) of criminal homicide is manslaughter by negligence. Although the term "homicide" is generally used throughout the report, the two studies conducted in Kansas City and Detroit used differing definitions. Kansas City included only murder and nonnegligent manslaughter in its use of the term "homicide." Detroit, on the other hand, included homicides classified by the state of Michigan as murder-1, murder-2, nonnegligent manslaughter, negligent manslaughter, excusable homicide, and justified homicide. Traffic deaths, however, were excluded.

FBI as part of the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) provides this profile of these two crimes:

- Approximately two-thirds of all murders were committed by relatives, friends, or acquaintances of the victims; about a quarter were committed by family members; more than half of these family killings involved spouse killing spouse.
- The victims of murder in 1975 were male in approximately three out of four instances, a ratio similar to those of the last several years.
- Approximately 51 percent of murder victims were white, 47 percent black, and 2 percent other races.
- Thirty percent of murder victims were between 20 and 29 years of age.
- Firearms were used to commit murders in 66 percent of the cases; 51 percent were committed with handguns alone. Cutting or stabbing weapons were used 18 percent of the time. The remainder were committed with personal weapons (hands, fists, feet, etc.) or with blunt objects or other weapons.
- Firearms were used in approximately 25 percent of the aggravated assaults; a knife or other cutting instrument was used in 24 percent, a blunt object or other weapon in 25 percent, and personal weapons in 26 percent.

Data from other studies, particularly Wolfgang and Curtis, provide a clearer picture:

- Although interracial violence is increasing, the vast majority of all homicides and aggravated assaults involve persons of the same race.
- Most homicides and aggravated assaults spring from relatively trivial motivations—such as altercations or domestic quarrels.
- Approximately a quarter of all homicides result from strong provocation by the victim. In these cases the characteristics of the victims regarding prior offenses and other traits closely resemble those of most offenders.

- A large percentage of both offenders and victims of homicides and aggravated assaults have police records, with offenders having a higher percentage; a large number of prior offenses involve crimes of violence.

Among the new findings emerging from the Police Foundation-funded studies in Detroit and Kansas City are these:

- There appears to be a distinct relationship between domestic-related homicides and aggravated assaults and prior police interventions for disputes and disturbances. The Kansas City study found that in the two years preceding the domestic assault or homicide, the police had been at the address of the incident for disturbance calls at least once in about 85 percent of the cases, and at least five times in about 50 percent of the cases.[11] The study showed similar results regarding the number of police calls to the residence of either victims or offenders.
- Analysis of Kansas City data showed that violence frequently was preceded by threats. The analysis found that when threats were made, physical violence occurred in slightly more than half the cases studied; if physical force had been involved in a disturbance, threats had been made in almost 80 percent of the cases.
- The Detroit study likewise showed the importance of threats as predictors of violence; the study found that 53 out of 90 homicides involving family members were preceded by threats.

The rest of this chapter discusses in greater detail the available information about the circumstances and participants in homicides and aggravated assaults, with particular

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11. Caution must be observed in interpreting these results. Although the histories of prior calls to homicide and aggravated assault addresses suggest a clear relationship between disturbances and ultimate violence, no data are as yet available on what percentage of disturbance calls or repeated disturbance addresses never result in violence.

emphasis on these crimes committed by the spouses, sweethearts, relatives, or acquaintances of the victims.

VICTIM-OFFENDER RELATIONSHIPS

As Marvin Wolfgang points out, for homicide, "more so than in any other violation of conduct norms, the relationship the victim bears to the offender plays a role in explaining the reasons for such flagrant violation."[12]

In *Patterns in Criminal Homicide*, Wolfgang found that 25 percent of all homicides studied involved family members, 39 percent involved other primary group relationships, and 36 percent involved nonprimary group members, including 12 percent strangers. Curtis had similar results.

Researchers in Detroit found that most homicides are committed in the course of a conflict between persons who know each other. The study found that 50.3 percent of the homicides studied fell into this category;[13] and that 27.1 percent were "crime-related," that is, committed during the course of another crime.[14] The remaining 22.6 percent of Detroit homicides were not categorized because the identity of the offender was unknown.[15]

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12. Wolfgang, *Patterns in Criminal Homicide*, 203.

13. The study was not limited to those legal categories that are termed "criminal homicide," The study considered homicides classified as murder-1, murder-2, nonnegligent manslaughter, negligent manslaughter, excusable homicide, and justified homicide. Manslaughter cases stemming from traffic accidents were excluded.

14. Although conflict-motivated homicides constitute the majority of homicides in Detroit, there is nonetheless a sizable increase over Wolfgang's findings of the number of homicides that are crime-related—which we can extrapolate to be committed primarily by strangers. This figure is probably even larger than reported because it is likely that a sizable number of the crimes for which no offender is known were committed by strangers to the victims.

15. The Detroit data point to a general trend over time toward an increase in the percentage of homicides and aggravated assaults committed by strangers. A survey by the RAND Corporation suggests that there is a new pattern of murder in New York City. The study found that between 1968 and 1974, murders increased 60 percent and that a large part of the increase was due to "deliberate" murders, rather than crimes of passion. The study found that a portion of the increase stems from disputes over narcotics. (Dr. Arthur J. Swersey and Elizabeth Enloe, "Homicide in Harlem," New York: RAND Corporation, 1976, as reported in *New York Times*, February 27, 1976.)

In Kansas City, researchers found that approximately half of all homicides resulted from disturbances involving friends or relatives; about a third specifically involved domestic disturbances.

Aggravated assaults show many traits similar to those of homicides. A substantial proportion of these crimes is committed by friends and relatives of the victims, although this proportion is considerably smaller than for homicides. The Curtis analysis shows that about 14 percent of the crimes studied involved family members, and an additional 31.1 percent involved friends, lovers, or acquaintances. Of the cases in which the relationship of the assailant to the victim was known, about 21 percent involved strangers.

Domestic Violence

Wolfgang found that, of 136 victims with a familial relationship to their slayers, there were 100 husbands and wives, nine sons, eight daughters, three mothers, three brothers, two fathers, one sister, and ten other types of associations. Of the 100 marital relationships, 53 wives were slain by their husbands, and 47 husbands by their wives. (A significant point is that the wives constituted 41 percent of all women killed, whereas the husbands accounted for only 11 percent of all men killed.)

Researchers in the Detroit study found that 23 percent of the conflict-motivated homicides studied involved husbands and wives. This was the second largest category; the largest proportion of conflict-motivated homicides occurred between friends or acquaintances. For conflict-motivated assaults, the reverse was true. Married couples predominated, and friends and acquaintances were the second largest group.

The project in Kansas City, although structured differently from the other studies already cited, adds to our understanding of how, when, and between whom violence erupts. Rather than examining homicides, the study examined

various characteristics of a sample of domestic and other disturbances.[16]

Using a statistical technique called Automatic Interaction Detector (AID), the study analyzed a group of variables in combination to determine their relationship to whether physical force was used in the disturbance.[17] Physical force was used as the determining factor because this study assumed that it constituted the common denominator of homicides and assaults. This analysis revealed that the relationship of the participants in the disturbance had the most effect on whether physical force was used. The study found that, although physical force was used in 43.3 percent of the disturbances studied, it was used in 54.4 percent of the disturbances involving persons who were married or divorced. When the participants were common-law spouses, relatives, strangers, or acquaintances, physical force was used 30.7 percent of the time.

Another element of the study was based on interviews with disturbance participants. Data from this part of the study indicate that disturbances involving no physical force were more frequent between spouses living together, whereas disturbances involving physical force tended to be between separated or divorced persons.[18]

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16. This sample consisted of 324 domestic disturbances reported on by the police officers who handled them. Because officers were requested but not required to complete cards on disturbances they handled, only 5 percent of all disturbances were reported on, so it cannot be said with certainty that the data obtained represent a typical cross-section of the domestic disturbances that occurred during the reporting period.

17. AID is a generalized multivariate analysis algorithm that uses analysis-of-variance techniques to explain the variance in a criterion variable. The technique makes successive dichotomous splits of a sample, using subsamples to "predict" the criterion variable so as to maximize differences among the split groups with respect to the criterion.

18. The findings from this element of the study are only tentative and not statistically significant because only 25 interviews were completed.

HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

One of the most striking patterns found in homicides and aggravated assaults is the prevalence of violence and conflict in the histories of both offenders and victims.

Wolfgang was one of the first criminologists to show this strong correlation. Prevailing wisdom up to that point had been that the typical person who commits homicide is a first offender. Wolfgang's data, on the other hand, showed that 64 percent of the offenders and 47 percent of the victims of homicide had a previous record. Furthermore, the data showed that a significant proportion of homicide offenders had a previous history of assaults.

Although Curtis' study does not address the question of past criminal records, both the Detroit and Kansas City studies report findings similar to Wolfgang's.

In the Detroit study, the researchers found that, among the conflict-motivated homicide cases, 53 percent of the offenders and 33 percent of the victims had criminal records.

In the Kansas City study, interviews with homicide offenders, aggravated assault offenders and victims, and dispute participants revealed that one-sixth of the homicide and assault group admitted having a prison record. One-tenth of this group reported a previous homicide record and more than a quarter a previous record for aggravated assault. No one in the disturbance group had a previous record for homicide and 10 percent had a previous aggravated assault record.[19]

The Kansas City researchers compiled arrest records for a variety of other crimes for the persons in the samples. These records revealed that half of the homicide offenders, a third of both aggravated assault offenders and victims, and between a third and a quarter of disturbance participants had some

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19. These data were compiled from background interviews conducted by Kansas City project personnel and patrol officers with 10 domestic homicide offenders, 24 domestic assault participants (13 offenders and 11 victims), and 21 participants in domestic disturbances.

sort of arrest record. The group that had the most arrests of all was homicide victims.

Conflict Histories

In addition to determining formal arrests of participants in homicides and aggravated assaults, both the Detroit and the Kansas City studies also examined conflict histories—as measured in past disturbances and disputes—of both victims and offenders in these two types of crimes. This is a new and important area of inquiry, linking—even if without as much precision as we might wish—the various points on the continuum of interpersonal conflict and violence.

To obtain a realistic picture of previous police contacts, the Kansas City study analyzed the addresses of homicide and assault participants to determine the number of police responses to disturbance calls at participants' addresses within a two-year period before the homicide or assault. This analysis showed that the police had responded to disturbance calls at the addresses of approximately 85 percent of the homicide victims or suspects; it also showed that the police had responded to five or more disturbance calls at the addresses of about 50 percent of them.

Similarly, the police had responded to disturbance calls at the addresses of approximately 85 percent of the aggravated assault victims or suspects, with five or more disturbance calls at the addresses of about 50 percent.[20]

Researchers in Detroit analyzed their data to ascertain the extent to which participants in assaults and homicides had been involved in other violent incidents. They found that 56.2 percent of the 144 assault victims interviewed said that they had had previous arguments with others that resulted in

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20. It is important to point out that these data showed a connection only between disturbance calls and *addresses*. The names of persons involved in each of the disturbances prior to the homicide or aggravated assault were not recorded. With so many calls, however, to the addresses of homicide and assault participants, it is reasonable to assume that a substantial number of these persons had previous contacts with the police. Addresses of apartment buildings with many tenants were eliminated from the analysis.

assaults against them, and that they had reported these assaults to the police. In addition, 48.6 percent of the assault victims reported violent interactions that had not been reported to the police. There is some overlap between these two response categories, because some victims mentioned both reported and unreported conflicts.

The study also made an effort to determine the intensity and severity of the past conflicts. According to police records, about 45 percent of the assault victims' previous injuries were serious enough to require medical attention.

Data for homicide participants were not so comprehensive but seemed to point to similarities in conflict histories for persons who became participants in either conflict-motivated assaults or homicides.

Many of the Detroit assault victims believed that they would be involved in future conflicts and assaults. A total of 87.4 percent of assault victims expressed the view that if conflicts occurred in the future, serious injury or death might result.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS: RACE, SEX, AGE

According to various studies, the following patterns emerge regarding the personal characteristics of victims and offenders:

• Most homicides and aggravated assaults are not interracial, although there seems to be some evidence that the proportion of interracial assault is growing.[21] Curtis found that violence between blacks accounted for 65.7 percent of the homicides and 65.9 percent of the assaults, and that violence between whites accounted for 24 percent of the homicides and 23.9 percent of the aggravated assaults. Data from

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21. Lynn Curtis examined reported violent crimes in several large cities for several years. He concluded that the only consistent trend was an increase in the percentage of crimes committed by black offenders against white victims. Most violent crime, however, remains intraracial. Curtis, *Criminal Violence*, 24-29.

the Detroit study revealed that violence between blacks accounted for 77.1 percent of the total homicides and 53.7 percent of the total aggravated assaults; violence between whites accounted for 13.8 percent of the homicides and 16 percent of the aggravated assaults. Less than 3 percent of the conflict-motivated homicides in Detroit were interracial, compared with 9.1 percent of all Detroit homicides. About 30 percent of all aggravated assaults for the period were interracial.

  • Men are by far the more frequent offenders and victims of homicides and aggravated assaults. In the Curtis analysis, violence between men accounted for 62.3 percent of the homicides and 56.6 percent of the aggravated assaults, whereas violence between females accounted for only 3.8 percent of the homicides and 7.1 percent of the assaults. Violence by men against women was responsible for 17.5 percent of the homicides and 27 percent of the assaults; violence by women against men accounted for 16.4 percent of the homicides and 9.3 percent of the assaults.[22] According to the data, when women use violence against men, the result is fatal in almost two-thirds of the cases. Violence by women also is almost always directed against a relative or a close friend. Findings in the Detroit study paralleled those of Curtis.

  • The age of offenders and victims of homicides and assaults—as for most violent crimes—tends to be in the twenties. Wolfgang found that the age of homicide offenders tended to be between 20 and 24; the age of victims tended to be between 25 and 30. In the Detroit study, the predominant age category for offenders and victims of homicides and for the offenders in assaults was between 21 and 29. A high percentage of these groups was also found between the ages of 30 and 39. For conflict-motivated homicides only, the study found that the age of offenders and victims was fairly evenly

22. It is probable, however, that nonfatal violence committed by women against men is less likely to be reported to the police than is violence by men against women; thus, women assaulters who come to the attention of the police are likely to be those who have killed someone.

distributed between 16 and 49 but that the number of both between the ages of 21 to 29 was the largest. For conflict-motivated assaults, 69.5 percent were between the ages of 20 and 39. The average age of both victims and offenders in conflict-motivated violence tended to be older. Researchers in Kansas City found in their sample that a third of those involved in a homicide or an aggravated assault were under age 25 compared with 10 percent of disturbance participants. This fact proved to be significant statistically, suggesting that younger people are more apt to resort to violence in a conflict.

VICTIM INVOLVEMENT

More than for other crimes, the victim of homicide or aggravated assault often provokes the attack that ends in his injury or death. This is not surprising considering the usually close nature of the relationship between the offender and the victim and the fact that passions often are running high on both sides before the crime occurs. American homicide laws recognize provocation by allowing mitigation of the charges against an offender if it appears that the victim was at fault.

Wolfgang's study in 1958 was the first major attempt to support with a body of data the idea that victims contribute to the crimes against them. Wolfgang coined the term "victim precipitation"—now widely used—to describe the phenomenon. Wolfgang devised a simple method for researchers to count victim-precipitated cases: ". . . those in which the victim was the first to show and use a deadly weapon, to strike a blow in altercation—in short, the first to commence the interplay of resort to physical violence."[23] Using this definition does not require the researcher to make a value judgment and, if anything, results in undercounts of the actual number of victim-precipitated crimes.

Wolfgang found that 26 percent of the cases he studied were victim-precipitated. In comparison with cases that were

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23. Wolfgang, *Patterns in Criminal Homicide*, 252.

not victim-precipitated, he found that victim-precipitated homicides had the following characteristics:

- A higher percentage of female offenders;
- A higher percentage of mate killings, with husbands more frequently the victims;
- A greater likelihood that the victim had been drinking; and
- A greater likelihood that the victim had an arrest record.

In general Wolfgang points out that the victim in a victim-precipitated case often resembles an offender. "In some cases," he writes, "two potential offenders come together in a homicide situation and it is probably only chance which results in one becoming a victim and the other an offender."[24]

The Detroit study also analyzed data about victim precipitation. It found that, in 45.5 percent of the homicides resulting from arguments, the victims initiated the conflict interaction, and offenders initiated the conflict in 38.6 percent of the cases. In another 8.3 percent of the homicides, victims and offenders together started the trouble, and in 7.8 percent someone other than offenders or victims did so.

The study found that in 69.8 percent of the conflict-motivated homicides, the offenders brought weapons into the conflict; victims did so in 6.2 percent of the cases, and both participants introduced weapons in 23.4 percent of the cases.

In the Kansas City study an analysis of arrest records revealed that homicide and aggravated assault victims had more arrests than the offenders for almost every crime.

MOTIVE

Motive—the reason why someone commits a crime—is in most homicides and aggravated assaults closely bound up with the relationship between the offender and the victim. As the term is used in many studies, motive does not attempt to

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24. *Ibid.*, 265.

describe underlying psychological causes for crimes but rather to describe in broad terms the circumstance of the crime or the general state of mind of the participants.

Wolfgang based his analysis on the terms used by many police departments in determining motives and found in his study of Philadelphia homicides that altercations, usually trivial, and domestic quarrels were most often the motives. These categories included 35 percent and 14.1 percent respectively of the total number of homicides studied. The third and fourth motives noted were jealousy (11.6 percent) and altercation over money (10.5 percent).

Curtis used essentially the same categories as Wolfgang for assessing motives in his analysis of the data gathered by the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, with essentially the same results. One difference is that Curtis found a relatively higher percentage of homicides to have been motivated by robbery.

The Detroit study analyzed 294 conflict-motivated homicides to determine motivation. The analysis showed that 30.6 percent involved family conflicts of various kinds; 16.7 percent were precipitated by jealousy, and 3.1 percent were preceded by arguments over business relationships. The largest category—49.7 percent—was composed of conflicts between friends, acquaintances, and neighbors. In a further analysis of the domestic homicides, the researchers found that 62 of the 90 cases in this category were preceded by a threat by the offender, the victim, or a third party. The researchers also found that 211 (63 percent) of the 338 conflict-motivated homicides studied resulted from conflicts related to perception of sex roles.

The Kansas City study did not collect data on motives as such, but in analyzing data about a number of domestic disturbances, the researchers found that frequently, in cases where force was used, one of the participants had made a threat. If a threat was made, the study found that physical force was used in half the cases; when physical force was used, threats had been made about 80 percent of the time. The researchers further found that the most important vari-

able governing whether a threat was made was a third party as the source of the disturbance.

WEAPON

The principal weapon in homicide is the firearm. There also is evidence that the choice of this weapon—instead of a knife or blunt instrument—is one of the major differences between whether the result of a violent attack is homicide or aggravated assault.

With the exception of Wolfgang's study—in which stabbing was the most frequent method of killing—all other major studies show the firearm to be the most common murder weapon. According to the UCR for 1975, firearms were used to commit murder in 66 percent of the cases; they were used in only 25 percent of the aggravated assaults. Knives or other cutting instruments were used in 18 percent of the homicides and 24 percent of the aggravated assaults.

There has been an increase in the proportion of guns used in homicides in recent years. According to Curtis, this proportion was 67 percent greater in 1972 than in 1964; the relative proportion of knives fell 35 percent.

Curtis' study also showed that knives were most often used in assaults against males of both races, but bodily weapons (fists, feet) led against females. Offenders turn more to instruments as they get older. Assaults among blacks involved knives more than any other weapon; bodily weapons in assaults were highest for white males and blunt instruments for white female assaulters.

According to a staff report of the Violence Commission:[25]

> Although other weapons are involved in homicide, firearms are not only the most deadly instrument of attack but also the most versatile. Firearms

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25. George D. Newton and Franklin E. Zimring, *Firearms and Violence in American Life*, A Staff Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969, 40.

make some attacks possible that simply would not occur without firearms. They permit attacks at greater range and from positions of better conceal-ment than other weapons. They also permit attacks by persons physically or psychologically unable to overpower their victim through violent physical contact.

The Detroit study found that almost 53 percent of the conflict-motivated homicides were committed with handguns and another 19 percent with shotguns or rifles. On the other hand, almost 74 percent of the homicides that were not conflict-motivated were committed with handguns and another 9 percent with shotguns or rifles. No weapons infor-mation was available for assaults. Given that most conflict-motivated homicides and aggravated assaults are committed in passion and without premeditation and that firearms are more lethal than other weapons, it seems reasonable to con-clude that if firearms were less readily available, the rate of aggravated assault would rise at the expense of that for homicide.

CHAPTER III

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
AND THE POLICE: KANSAS CITY

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In February 1973, under a grant from the Police Foundation, the Northeast Patrol Division Task Force of the Kansas City Police Department appointed a project team to explore the relationship between domestic disturbances and the violent crimes of homicide and aggravated assault. The following sections are summaries of some of the major findings from the study. The sections deal, first, with the degree to which the Kansas City Police Department had previous contact with persons involved in homicides and assaults and, second, with an examination of some of the similar characteristics and patterns found in homicides, aggravated assaults, and disturbances.

PREVIOUS POLICE CONTACT WITH HOMICIDE
AND AGGRAVATED ASSAULT PARTICIPANTS

To determine previous police contact, the project first examined the arrest records of homicide and assault participants. The records revealed that in about a quarter of the

homicides (32 percent in 1970 and 22 percent in 1971) and more than a third of the aggravated assaults (37 percent in 1970 and 1971) either the victim or the suspect had been arrested for a disturbance or assault within two years before the homicide or aggravated assault. The Kansas City project staff believed, however, that these findings were not an adequate gauge of previous police contact, because many disturbance calls do not result in arrests. To obtain a more realistic picture, the project analyzed the addresses of homicide and assault participants to determine how frequently police had responded to disturbance calls at those addresses within the two-year period before the homicide or assault. This analysis indicated that the police had responded to at least one such call at the addresses of approximately 90 percent (94.5 percent in 1970 and 84.1 percent in 1971) of the homicide victims or suspects, and to five or more at the addresses of about 50 percent (52 percent in 1970 and 46.3 percent in 1971).

The police had responded to disturbance calls at the addresses of approximately 85 percent (86.9 percent in 1970 and 81.2 percent in 1971) of the aggravated assault victims or suspects, with five or more disturbance calls at the addresses of about 50 percent (50.2 percent in 1970 and 49.6 percent in 1971).[26]

It is important to note, however, that the data showed a connection only between disturbance calls and *addresses*. The names of persons involved in each of the disturbances preceding the homicide or aggravated assault were not recorded. Because of the frequency of calls, it is likely that a substantial number of these persons had had previous police contact. Conclusions drawn from the apparent relationship of disturbance calls to homicides and assaults must be tentative, because no information is available on the percentage of disturbances that do not result in homicides and assaults.

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26. Addresses of apartment buildings with many tenants were eliminated from the analysis.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HOMICIDES, AGGRAVATED ASSAULTS, DISTURBANCES, AND PARTICIPANTS

Because participants in homicides and aggravated assaults appeared to have had frequent contact with the police, the project next attempted to discover whether there are patterns in these crimes that can be recognized in advance.

The project used three data collection instruments: (1) Disturbance Profile Cards; (2) onsite disturbance interviews; and (3) background interviews.

Disturbance Profile Cards

Officers in the Northeast Patrol Division were asked, but not required, to complete a brief card for each disturbance handled between May 1 and September 1, 1973. The officers submitted 324 cards, representing only 5 percent of the total domestic disturbances that occurred during the period. Thus there is no way of knowing if the disturbances in the sample are a typical cross-section.

Project staff analyzed the data two ways. In the first—discriminant analysis—one variable is chosen as the criterion variable; the presence of this factor in a given situation is then analyzed in relationship to each of the other variables. Because this method cannot analyze variables in combination, project staff used a second method—the Automatic Interaction Detector (AID)—which predicts by patterns of predictor variables.

Using these two methods, the staff analyzed the data for each variable's predictive value in regard to (1) physical force, (2) threats, (3) arrest of disturbance participant, and (4) probability of future violence as assessed by police officer. (Table 1 lists all the variables on the Disturbance Profile Card.) Participants 1 and 2 were arbitrarily designated in the analysis.

Physical Force. Physical force, the common denominator of most assaults and homicides, was chosen as the first criterion variable against which the others were compared or patterned.

TABLE 1

VARIABLES LISTED ON THE DISTURBANCE PROFILE CARD

VARIABLE NAME	VARIABLE DESCRIPTION
1. Day	Day of week
2. Time	Time of day
3. House	Type of dwelling (house or apartment)
4. Race 1	Race of participant 1
5. Sex 1	Sex of participant 1
6. Age 1	Age of participant 1
7. Arrest 1	Participant 1 arrested
8. Attitude 1	Attitude of participant 1
9. Threats 1	Threats made by participant 1
10. Previous arrest 1	Previous arrest for disturbance of participant 1
11. Race 2	Race of participant 2
12. Sex 2	Sex of participant 2
13. Age 2	Age of participant 2
14. Arrest 2	Participant 2 arrested
15. Attitude 2	Attitude of participant 2
16. Threats 2	Threats made by participant 2
17. Previous arrest 2	Previous arrest for disturbance of participant 2
18. Relationship 1 and 2	Relationship of participants 1 and 2
19. Money	Money as the source of disturbance
20. Children	Children as the source of disturbance
21. Mental	Mental illness as the source of the disturbance

TABLE 1
(continued)

VARIABLES LISTED ON THE DISTURBANCE PROFILE CARD

VARIABLE NAME	VARIABLE DESCRIPTION
22. Promiscuity	Promiscuity as the source of the disturbance
23. Relative	Relative as the source of the disturbance
24. Third party	Third party as the source of the disturbance
25. Alcohol problem	Alcohol-related problem as the source of the disturbance
26. Gun	Presence of gun in the disturbance
27. Knife	Presence of knife in the disturbance
28. Other weapon	Presence of other weapon in the disturbance
29. Alcohol presence	Presence of alcohol in the disturbance
30. Physical force	Physical force involved in disturbance
31. Future violence	Officer's prediction of future violence at that address
32. Previous disturbance	History of previous disturbance

According to discriminant analysis:

• The single variable with the most power to predict the use of physical force was the presence of a gun in the disturbance. The presence of a gun had a discriminatory power of 29.14 percent, meaning that it accounted for 29.14 percent of the difference between disturbances involving and not involving physical force.

• The second best predictor variable, with a discriminatory power of 11.43 percent, was a history of previous disturbances.

- The third best predictor variable, with a discriminatory power of 11.38 percent, was the presence of alcohol.

According to the AID program:

- The relationship of participants 1 and 2, i.e., married, divorced, common-law spouses, relatives, strangers, or acquaintances, had the most effect upon whether or not physical force occurred in a disturbance. Of the total sample, 42.3 percent involved physical force, but when participants 1 and 2 were either married or divorced, physical force occurred 54.4 percent of the time. In contrast, when participants 1 and 2 were either common-law spouses, relatives, strangers, or acquaintances, physical force occurred only 30.7 percent of the time.

- One pattern of variables in combination that was characterized by a high degree of physical force involved participants who were married or divorced, the disturbance occurred between midnight and 4 P.M., and participant 1 had a previous arrest for disturbance. Of these 15 cases, 93 percent involved physical force.

Threats. A second variable against which the other variables were patterned was threats made by participants 1 and 2. It was found that whenever threats were made, physical force occurred in slightly more than half of the cases (53.9 percent). When physical force was involved in a disturbance, threats had been made in 78.7 percent of the cases. This finding suggests that violence is often preceded and forewarned by threats.

According to discriminant analysis:

- The most important variable in explaining threats made by participant 1 was a third party as the source of the disturbance.

- The most important variable in explaining threats made by participant 2 was promiscuity as the source of the disturbance.

These variables are very similar, as would be expected, since participants 1 and 2 were arbitrarily designated.

The results of the AID program analysis of patterns of conflict characterized by threats were inconclusive.

Arrest of disturbance participant. To determine the circumstances under which police officers made arrests on disturbance calls, the project analyzed variables against the criterion of whether participant 1 or 2 had been arrested.

According to discriminant analysis:

• The variable with the highest discriminatory power when either participant 1 or participant 2 was arrested was the presence of a firearm.

• The second most powerful variable in explaining the arrest of participant 1 was a third party as the source of the disturbance.

• The second most powerful variable affecting the arrest of participant 2 was alcohol as the source of the disturbance.

Using the AID program, the project found no consistent patterns that were related to the arrest of a participant in a domestic disturbance.

Probability of future violence. The Disturbance Profile Card enabled the police officer to record a prediction of whether violence would occur at the scene of the disturbance at some time in the future. Overall, the officers tended to predict that violence was more likely to occur than not for any given disturbance.

The AID program did not find any consistent patterns associated with high predictions of future violence.

Onsite Disturbance Interviews

Project members used the onsite disturbance interview form to collect data on domestic disturbances that had just occurred. After patrol officers had resolved a disturbance call, project members occasionally attempted to interview both participants in the disturbance. On many occasions, however, only one was available. Because only 25 interviews were conducted, the results are not statistically significant. The general findings, however, include the following:

• In disturbances involving physical force, the age difference between participants tended to be five to ten years. In contrast, the age difference between participants in disturbances not involving physical force tended to be less than five years.

- Disturbances involving no physical force were most frequent between spouses living together, whereas disturbances involving physical force tended to be between separated or divorced persons.

- In disturbances involving the use of physical force, both participants tended to have previous arrests for disturbances, but only one of the participants in disturbances not involving physical force had a previous disturbance arrest.

- In disturbances involving physical force, the officer tended to discuss the situation with the participants separately and to reprimand them both. In disturbances not involving physical force, the officer tended to discuss the situation with the participants together.

Background Interviews

The background interview was designed by project members to obtain information from participants in homicides, aggravated assaults, and disturbances about their personal background and the circumstances surrounding the incident. The interviews were conducted by project members and volunteer police officers from the Northeast Patrol Division.[27]

The original goal was to interview the surviving participants in 15 homicides and both participants in 15 assaults and 15 disturbances. However, because of problems in locating individuals or because of refusals to cooperate, interviews actually were completed with 55 participants—10 homicide, 24 aggravated assault, and 21 disturbance. Data from the 10 homicide and 24 aggravated assault interviews were combined for comparison with the 21 disturbance interviews because the small number of interviews made a three-way comparison meaningless.

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27. The use of police officers to conduct these interviews may raise questions about the data. For instance, although some training was provided, it was too little to assure that each of the police interviewers completely understood the questions to be asked or to assure that they all used the same approach in conducting the interviews. It is also possible that the responses of the persons being interviewed were affected by the fact that police officers were asking them questions about police matters.

The project compared the sample of homicide and assault participants and the sample of disturbance participants for each of the variables measured. Like the onsite disturbance interview, the background interview was somewhat lengthy, and sample sizes were relatively small. Only nine of 77 variables were found to be statistically significant.[28]

Age. About a third of the homicide and assault participants were under 25, as compared to about 10 percent of the disturbance participants. There is little difference between the other age groups. A test for significance indicated that although there was little difference among most of the age groups, there was a difference between the homicide and assault sample and the disturbance sample in the under-25 age group, suggesting that younger people tend more often to resort to violence in resolving a conflict.

Marital Status. Tests compared single subjects to separated or divorced subjects, and married subjects to separated or divorced subjects. The results approached, but did not reach, significance; they indicated that the probability of violence appears to be highest among those who are estranged.

Family Background. Information on family background from the two samples revealed that among those whose parents were still living, more than three-fourths of the homicide or assault participants reported having contact with their parents at least once a week, as compared with half of the disturbance sample. It is interesting, though not statistically significant, that more than a quarter of the homicide and assault sample reported having frequent arguments with their parents, but only 6 percent of the disturbance sample reported such arguments.

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28. When appropriate, a chi-square test with Yates' correction for continuity was used with a 2x2 celled table. When any cell of a 2x2 table had an expected frequency of less than five, Fisher's exact probability was calculated instead of the chi-square. In some instances a significance of proportions test was calculated. For some tables larger than 2x2, where the expected frequency of a cell was less than one and more than 20 percent of the cells had an expected frequency of less than five, no statistical tests were performed unless adjacent cells were combined. Results were considered to be statistically significant if the two-tailed probability level was .05 or less.

Of those persons having brothers or sisters, slightly more than half of the homicide and assault sample reported having contact with their siblings at least once a week as compared with about one-sixth of the disturbance sample. Although this difference was significant, there was little difference between the two samples with regard to the frequency of arguments with brothers or sisters.

Previous Records. About one-sixth of the homicide and assault sample admitted having a prison record, but none of the disturbance participants reported previous imprisonment. More than 10 percent of the homicide and assault sample reported a previous homicide record and more than one-fourth a previous record for aggravated assault, whereas no one in the disturbance sample reported a previous record for homicide and only 10 percent a previous record for aggravated assault. These findings approached significance and together suggested that homicide suspects and aggravated assault participants tend to have a history of violence.

Firearms. Past studies have indicated the large role that firearms play in homicides and assaults. In the homicide and assault sample, 29.2 percent reported that a firearm was normally kept at the scene of the incident, as did 28.6 percent of the disturbance sample. Although there was very little difference between the two samples, it was surprising to discover such a relatively low frequency of firearms reported to be normally present in the home, especially since possession of firearms is legal in Kansas City. One explanation may be that people who have been in trouble with the police are reluctant to reveal their ownership of a firearm. A poll taken in the United States in 1968 found that 49 percent of American households reported owning a firearm.[29]

Sexual Behavior. More than one-fourth of the homicide and assault sample said they were frequently unfaithful to their spouses. In comparison, only 5 percent of the disturbance sample reported infidelity as often as once a month.

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29. Newton and Zimring, *Firearms and Violence in American Life*, 6.

Relationship of Participants. In both samples the majority of participants in the cases were relatives. This proportion, however, was significantly smaller in the homicide and assault sample. This sample also reported a significantly lower proportion of cases where the participants lived together. These results seem to indicate that weaker interpersonal relationships increase the probability that a domestic disturbance will evolve into an aggravated assault or homicide.

Calls for Assistance. Another finding was that close to half of the homicide and assault sample reported that they had never called the police for a disturbance. In contrast, only a quarter of the disturbance sample made the same statement. The difference between the two samples was even greater among those who reported calling the police. Almost two-thirds of the homicide and assault sample reported calling the police for disturbances less than once a year, compared with only one-seventh of the disturbance sample. This difference was highly significant.

The finding, at first glance, appears to contradict the finding that a large percentage of homicide and assault participants had previous disturbance calls to their addresses. The information from the background interview reflects the number of times the individual participant had called the police about a disturbance, but does not include disturbances in which the individual was involved but someone else called the police.

The homicide and assault sample showed somewhat less reluctance to call friends or relatives for assistance with conflicts, with only about 40 percent reporting that they called no one. In contrast, nearly 60 percent of the disturbance sample reported that they had called no one. The disturbance sample, however, was almost as likely to call a social or religious agency as friends or relatives. This was not true for the homicide and assault sample, leading to the conclusion that the homicide and assault sample had considerably less faith in intervention by established community organizations than did the disturbance sample.

Attitudes Toward the Judicial System. When asked whether charges should be dropped to keep a person out of court, about 40 percent of the homicide and assault sample said no, as compared to only about 5 percent of the disturbance sample—a difference that is statistically significant. Another question—"If charges are not brought against someone for a disturbance, will they be more likely to repeat their disturbance behavior?"—revealed little difference between the two groups. About two-thirds of each sample answered affirmatively. These results suggest that both samples believe that a person is more likely to become involved in a disturbance again if no charges are brought. The disturbance participants, however, tended to be more lenient in their attitudes, since they stated earlier that if a person was arrested the charges should be dropped to keep him out of court.

CHAPTER IV

CONFLICT-MOTIVATED HOMICIDES AND ASSAULTS IN DETROIT

G. Marie Wilt and James D. Bannon

In 1974, the Police Foundation funded a study by the Detroit Police Department and a Wayne State University sociologist to examine the circumstances surrounding conflict-motivated assaults and homicides in that city. A major goal of the project was to understand these crimes as social interactions and parts of complex social situations. To this end, the following sections, excerpted from the report, deal with (1) the conflict histories of participants in assaults and homicides, (2) initiation of the conflicts, and (3) interaction patterns that preceded conflict-motivated homicides.

CONFLICT HISTORIES

An important variable in this study was the extent to which participants in assaults and homicides had been involved in other violent incidents. Of 144 assault victims interviewed, 81 (56.2 percent) indicated that they had been victims in previous conflict-motivated assaults, and that they had reported these assaults to the police.

Furthermore, 70 (48.6 percent) of the assault victims reported violent interactions that had not been reported to

the police. There is some overlap between these two response categories; some victims in the assault sample had been involved in both reported and unreported conflicts on other occasions.

The project made an effort to determine the intensity and severity of past conflicts. According to police records, 68 assault victims' previous conflicts were so severe that medical treatment for physical injuries was required. Sixty of the cases had involved lethal weapons—most frequently firearms or knives.

Information on homicide participants was not so comprehensive but it seemed to point to similar conclusions. Of 338 conflict-motivated homicides, the participants in 136 cases had engaged in previous verbal arguments, according to the homicide files. In 86 homicidal conflict situations the participants had engaged in previous physical violence. And in 32 instances lethal weapons had been used in previous violent encounters between persons who later became participants in homicides. In addition, 14 persons had reported past arguments to the police and another 77 had discussed with relatives and friends the occurrence of violent conflicts.

Participants in only ten of the conflict-motivated homicides indicated any efforts on their part to seek professional counseling or therapy for resolving continuing conflict. Among the victims of conflict-motivated assaults, 26 had sought therapy or counseling.

Of the 90 assault victims who expected to be involved in future conflicts, 63 (70 percent) also believed that those future interactions would be increasingly severe or intense. The great majority—84.7 percent—of assault victims believed that, if conflicts occurred in the future, serious injury or death might result.

CONFLICT INTERACTION CHARACTERISTICS

Two of the important stages in a confrontation that leads to violence are the initiation of the conflict and the introduction of a weapon. In 145 (45.5 percent) of the homicides resulting from arguments, the victims initiated the con-

flicts, while offenders did so in 123 (38.6 percent) instances. In another 26 (8.3 percent) cases, victims and offenders together started the trouble, while in 25 (7.8 percent) cases someone other than offenders or victims did so.

In 236 (69.8 percent) of the cases, the offenders brought weapons into the conflict; victims did so in 21 (6.2 percent) cases, and both participants introduced weapons in 79 (23.4 percent) cases. Thus, although victims were more likely than offenders to initiate the argument, victims were also much less likely to introduce weapons. It appears that in many cases the victims misjudged their own ability to arouse hostility in others.

The offenders who brought lethal weapons into these conflicts carried them on their persons in 167 (53.0 percent) of the cases. Another 138 (43.8 percent) obtained weapons at the homicide site, 3 (1 percent) got them from cars, and 7 (2.2 percent) secured them elsewhere.

Of the victims who introduced weapons into conflict-motivated homicides, 64 (64.0 percent) had the weapons on their persons while 32 (32.0 percent) obtained weapons from cars, and another two (2 percent) secured weapons elsewhere. Whether or not the participants intended or expected violence, many were equipped to resolve their conflicts with weapons.

INTERACTION PATTERNS PRECEDING CONFLICT-MOTIVATED HOMICIDES

An analysis of the apparent motives, as described in the police files, that precipitated the 338 conflict-motivated homicides in 1972 was inconclusive. The project, therefore, tried to provide a more descriptive and comprehensive analysis based on material obtained from offenders' statements. This discussion treats only those motives (or subjects of arguments) that precipitated the specific interactions resulting in homicides. Long-term problems or influences are not reflected.

The sample studied included 294 conflict-motivated homicides. Other homicides of this kind were excluded because of inadequate information in the case files. Of these

294, 90 (30.6 percent) involved family conflicts of various kinds; 49 (16 percent) were precipitated by jealousy; nine (3.1 percent) were preceded by arguments over business relationships. The largest category included the 146 (49.7 percent) conflicts between friends, acquaintances, and neighbors.

Family Conflicts

The project analyzed five components of the interaction patterns of the 90 family conflicts: conflict patterns, conflict histories,[30] sex role concepts and interactions, parental role concepts and interactions, and economic role concepts and interactions.

Conflict Patterns. Conflict patterns were divided into 12 general types. Most frequent, involving 32 of these cases, were arguments that began with some sort of verbal challenge —a demand, insult, or threat—between husband and wife which then escalated into a physical conflict. During the fight the victim threatened to kill the offender, who reacted by obtaining a lethal weapon. At this point in the conflict the offender either warned the victim to stop the argument or fought with the victim over the weapon, and a homicide was the result.

The next most frequent conflict pattern (21 cases) also began with verbal challenges between husband and wife and then became a physical fight. In this pattern, the offender initiated the argument, had a weapon, and eventually made a violent attack on the victim. From the very beginning of these conflicts, both the intensity and the apparent intention to start an argument were greater than in the first conflict pattern. The offenders in the second pattern were motivated more specifically toward seriously harming or killing the victims.

The third pattern of family conflicts also began with verbal challenges that developed into physical struggles be-

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30. Conflict patterns refer to interactions just before and during these homicides. Conflict histories refer to some form of continuing conflict that took place over various periods of time but eventually developed into homicidal interactions.

tween husband and wife. However, in this pattern (nine cases) another member of the family—most frequently a son, daughter, brother, or sister—intervened in the conflict, obtained a lethal weapon, and demanded that the person who began the argument end it at once. This intervention was always precipitated by the fact that the person who began the argument threatened to kill the spouse. When the conflict continued despite the demands of the intervenor, the intervenor attacked with the lethal weapon. The initiator of the argument became the victim and the intervenor became the offender.

The fourth family conflict pattern (eight cases) consisted of verbal and physical abuse of young children (all under five years of age) by their parents or by one parent and another adult. In all these cases the physical attacks upon these children became so violent or prolonged (continuing for several weeks in one instance) that the children died. These were the only homicides involving young children and their parents.

The fifth and sixth conflict patterns concerned only spouses. In the fifth pattern (two cases) both spouses were drinking with friends and exchanging joking, but insulting, comments. One spouse then made insults not accepted by the other as amusing; the offender obtained a weapon, and attacked and killed the insulting spouse. The sixth pattern (one case) was similar except that the offender did the insulting and then also attacked and killed the victim.

The next three conflict patterns involved arguments between parents and one of their adult children. Those conflicts all began verbally and escalated into physical struggles. In each case, a participant then introduced a weapon in an attempt to stop the argument. The final segments of the conflicts differ, however. In the seventh pattern (two cases) the person who started the argument was asked to stop and was then killed after ignoring the warning. In the eighth pattern (three cases) the person who began the argument had the weapon and in the course of the conflict killed the other disputant. The ninth pattern (two cases) involved a third

member of the family intervening with a weapon and killing the person who began the argument.

Three other patterns of family conflict involved adult siblings. These patterns are identical to the three discussed above, with only the participants differing. All these conflict patterns began with verbal disputes, developed into physical assaults, and were resolved when someone intervened with a weapon. In the tenth pattern (four cases) the person who started the argument was asked to stop and was killed when he or she ignored the warning. In the eleventh pattern (five cases) the person who began the conflict had the weapon and used it to resolve the problem. In the last pattern (one case) another family member intervened with a weapon and killed the person who began the argument.

Conflict Histories. Of the 90 family conflict homicides, 62 were preceded by histories of conflicts. In 37 of these cases previous arguments between the persons who became homicide participants had been frequent; they had concerned the same issue in dispute at the time of the homicide or a related issue. Another 18 homicides were preceded by histories of generalized verbal and physical conflicts between offender and victim.

There were four cases in which the victims and three cases in which the offenders in conflict-motivated homicides had extensive histories of violent verbal and physical conflicts with many other persons. In neither of these patterns were victims' or offenders' previous conflicts limited to violent interactions with those involved in the homicide.

Sex Roles. The project also studied family interactions based on sex role definitions and perceptions. In other words, the project analyzed the way homicide participants interpreted their male or female roles as reflected in their interaction patterns.

The sex role variable was relevant in 66 family conflict homicides. In 21 of them husbands verbally insulted, then physically attacked their wives when the latter objected to the insults. In all 21 cases the men indicated to their wives that they should accept their husbands' insults passively. In

18 other instances the husband ordered his wife to do something for him but was not satisfied with the way she performed the task. In some of these situations he began shouting at her, and in others he began a physical conflict.

Thirteen cases were precipitated by a man who insulted his wife, then told her that she deserved to be killed or that he was going to kill her because she was worthless. In three cases a woman verbally insulted her husband in the presence of relatives or friends. The husband reacted by physically attacking his wife, indicating that she was not going to "get away with" that sort of behavior. In two cases a woman insulted her husband and proceeded to attack him physically when the man objected to the insults.

In all of the situations described above one person was defining another as an object of personal property and acting on the basis of that definition. The men acted toward their spouses in terms of object conceptions much more frequently than did the women.

Other cases in which sex roles appeared relevant included reactions of protectiveness on the part of one of the participants in the conflict-motivated homicide. In two cases a man was protecting his wife from an attack by another person and in one case a boy intervened in an argument to protect his mother. Five other instances involved men who intervened in either a verbal or physical conflict to protect a female relative other than their wives or mothers. In one other case a mother intervened in an argument to protect her children from an attack.

Parental Roles. Parental role concepts and interactions appeared in 16 family conflict homicides. In six (four involving mothers and two involving fathers) parents saw their children as property to be dealt with as the parent desired. Seven cases (five involving mothers and two involving fathers) involved family situations in which a parent was indifferent to the children and ignored them. One situation involved a man's dislike for his children and consequent intentional abuse of them, and another a mother's efforts to intervene in the father's abuse of their children.

Finally, there was one family conflict homicide in which a father saw his children as competition. In this case the man expressed resentment toward the children for attention their mother gave them.

Economic Problems. Economic problems were relevant in 19 family conflict homicides. In six instances, lack of family financial resources was the source of conflict or resentment between husband and wife, while in three cases financial problems resulted in resentment or conflict between parents and children. In five situations husbands and wives differed about appropriate uses of money. In three families women accused their husbands of being incompetent in the role of provider for the family.

In two other cases a relative or friend living with a family was accused of not contributing sufficiently to the economic well-being of the household. In one of these cases a disabled relative was beaten to death by a couple because they wanted him to give them all his welfare income.

Jealousy Conflicts

Various forms of jealousy were responsible for 49 of the conflict-motivated homicides.

Conflict Patterns. One conflict pattern was involved in 11 cases in which the offender made a physical attack upon the victim because of jealousy. Another pattern (eight cases) involved arguments in which one man demanded that another man leave "his woman" alone and fights ensued. In another pattern (seven cases) the person who became the victim of the homicide attacked the offender in a jealousy conflict.

Another seven jealousy conflict homicides developed from arguments which began when a man accused his wife or girlfriend of being unfaithful. These arguments escalated into physical struggles, weapons were obtained, and the women were killed. Ten other cases were similar, except that the men became the victims of the homicides. In one other incident the woman was killed after she accused her male friend of being unfaithful.

In one conflict two women were arguing over a mutual boyfriend. One woman threatened the other, and a fight and homicide developed from this conflict. In addition, four homicides resulted from jealousy conflicts between male homosexuals. In these conflict sequences the men made mutual accusations of infidelity and then began fights, in each of which one man was killed.

Sex Roles. Forty-three of these jealousy conflict homicides offer some insights into the sex role and interactions involved. The most common pattern (20 cases) was characterized by an individual's becoming angry because a spouse or lover intended to terminate the relationship immediately. Another frequent situation (14 cases) involved competition between two people over a third person. In nine other interactions one spouse accused the other of being unfaithful; the accused person responded with a denial and also expressed resentment at the charge.

Conflicts Between Friends or Acquaintances

The project analyzed three variables for homicides occurring between friends, acquaintances, or neighbors: conflict patterns, sex role concepts and interactions, and drinking patterns.

Conflict Patterns. In terms of conflict patterns, 40 cases involved physical attacks which followed prior verbal or physical incidents. In 43 other instances either the homicide victim or the offender accused the other of stealing, cheating, or some other form of inappropriate behavior. Weapons were then brought into the conflicts, and attacks were made. Thirteen similar cases differed only in that a person or persons other than the participants in the precipitating argument intervened with a weapon to stop the fight.

Twenty homicides occurred at parties at which people were drinking heavily and then began to argue. The arguments escalated into physical fights, with weapons used to resolve the conflict. In 20 other instances no conflict pre-

ceded the homicides,[31] although the homicides occurred in a social situation. The persons involved were toying or clowning with loaded guns and accidentally shot and killed others.

Ten conflict-motivated homicides began as arguments between neighbors who disliked each other. Verbal insults were followed by physical attacks, and weapons were then used to resolve the conflicts, with one or more deaths resulting.

Sex Roles. Sex role concepts and interactions were identifiable in 102 of the conflicts between friends, acquaintances, or neighbors. In 27 cases men were seeking revenge for previous insults or physical attacks. In 21 cases men had been insulted immediately prior to the homicide and reacted by attempting to protect their reputations or honor. In 27 other instances two or more men were competing with each other, each attempting to show that he was better than or at least as good as the other person.

Revenge was also the motivation in 16 other cases, with men retaliating for insults or physical attacks made against female friends or relatives. In 15 cases the men had loaded guns which they were showing off to friends.

Drinking. Drinking occurred in 60 conflict homicides. In 29 of them all persons involved were drinking heavily, while in 23 only "social drinking"—two or three drinks per person—was apparent. In five cases persons who became victims were told that they were drinking too much and were asked to stop; others present were drinking much less or not at all. In three similar cases persons who became offenders were told they had been drinking too much.

Business Conflicts

There were also nine business conflict homicides that were analyzed in terms of conflict patterns and economic and status role concepts and interactions.

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31. These homicides were categorized as conflict-motivated, however, because they occurred in a social interaction situation and were not related to the commission of other crimes.

Conflict Patterns. One conflict pattern was evident in six cases that began with verbal disagreements concerning business problems and then became hostile arguments. Physical struggles followed and lethal weapons were used. Another business conflict was initiated by a physical attack, with no verbal argument preceding. In another situation a third person intervened with a weapon in the original verbal and physical conflict and thus became the offender. In another business conflict homicide the offender intentionally killed the victim over a business problem.

Status Roles. Economic or status role concepts and interactions were relevant to all nine of these homicides. In three situations employer and employee disagreed about work performance. Three other cases involved business people and clients who disagreed about the quality or price of products being purchased. In the three remaining instances business partners could not agree on how to handle an issue or resolve a problem.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Homicides and aggravated assaults are often private acts, committed in intimate surroundings, by a spouse, lover, friend, or acquaintance of the victim. The police are rarely on the scene—nor could they be—when the crimes occur.

Nonetheless, there is evidence that many of these crimes show similar patterns. Studies of the situations that precede them and of the characteristics of the disputants, including histories of previous police contact, repeatedly point to certain recurring factors. Although these data do not provide an absolute guide for police (no foolproof method will ever be found) they should assist in identifying potentially dangerous situations at the point when police are frequently asked to respond.

Studies indicate that the following are the major factors:

• Many victims and offenders in homicides are young, with offenders generally younger than the victims.

• The persons involved usually have a strong history of conflict; they frequently have arrest records and also have frequently been involved in previous disputes or disturbances.

• The presence of a firearm has a high predictive value that violence will occur.

• The background and attitudes of the victim are almost as important as those of the offender in determining the final outcome of a disturbance.

- Threats should not be taken lightly; they frequently are a prelude to violent action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Both the Kansas City and Detroit studies discuss the relationship of interpersonal conflicts to violence. Because police are frequently called to intervene in conflicts that occur both with and without violence, the following recommendations are offered:

1. The whole category of disturbances should be examined to determine (a) what proportion of disturbance calls *never* results in violence, and (b) what characteristics, if any, of disturbance participants and situations indicate whether violence *does* or *does not* occur, even after numerous disturbance calls.

Although it is clear that a large number of homicides and assaults occur as a result of one or many arguments between intimates and acquaintances, it is not yet clear what proportion of disturbance participants have recurring arguments and police calls for service but no ultimate violent act such as an assault or homicide. This information is important in the development of predictors of violence for the police; overprediction of violence, as well as underprediction, may be damaging to both disturbance participants and police.

2. Another area to be examined is that of disposition of disturbance cases. A study of dispositions—including mediation by police officer, referral, other police procedures, and all criminal justice system dispositions of persons arrested in violent and nonviolent disturbance situations—might reveal those dispositions that reduce the likelihood of future violence.

3. With increased knowledge about both disturbance calls (violent and nonviolent) and the effectiveness of different dispositions in reducing the likelihood of future violence, a conflict intervention training program that incorporates this knowledge should be developed for police departments. Although many training programs now exist, it is hoped that the studies recommended above will provide police officers

with more precise kinds of information with which to define the situations they encounter and to make decisions based upon expected outcomes.