The Forgotten Victims: Elder Homicides

SEPTEMBER 25, 2017
TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

- If you are experiencing any technical issues with the audio for this session, please let us know in the feedback box.
- If you have technical difficulties during the webinar, contact Jason Adams, who is providing technical support for this webinar. His email address is jadams@ovcttac.org.
- Today’s session will be recorded and made available on the training website.
- If you have questions, type them in the feedback box. We will address as many as possible throughout the webinar.
ELDER JUSTICE INITIATIVE

The **mission** is to support and coordinate the Department of Justice’s enforcement and programmatic efforts to combat elder abuse, neglect, and financial fraud and scams that target older adults.

The Initiative does so by—

- Promoting justice for older adults.
- Helping older victims and their families.
- Enhancing state and local efforts through training and resources.
- Supporting research to improve elder abuse policy and practice.
Elder abuse is a complex issue that intersects with many disciplines.

Elder abuse can happen to anyone. It affects people of every ethnic background, gender, and financial status.
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The Forgotten Victims:
Elder Homicides

Micheline Lubin, M.D.
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King County Medical Examiner’s Office
September 25, 2017
Objectives

Describe how elder homicides are different from homicides of younger age groups.

Explain who are more likely to be victims of elder homicide.

List the common injuries that can be seen in elder homicides.
According to age–related population data, in 2000, persons older than 65 years old represented 10.5% of the population, and 10.9% in 2010.

In July 2016, according to the Census Bureau, the estimated total population of King County numbered 2,149,970.

Persons age 65 and older comprised 12.7% of that population number.
Rapidly growing population that is estimated to rise up to 83.7 million by 2050 (Census 2010 estimates)

By 2030, it is projected that more than 20% of the population will be 65 and over (Census 2010 estimates)

With the increase in population, the incidence of crime against this vulnerable group is likely to rise substantially
Racial Breakdown

- General population in King County (2016)
  - Caucasians 68.9%
  - Asians 17.4%
  - Blacks 6.8%
  - Native American 1%
  - Two or more races 5%
  - Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander 0.9%
Elder Homicide

Defined as the death of an elderly person over the age of 65 as a result of the harmful actions of another individual.

The elderly are the least likely group of people to be affected by homicides and represent only a small number of all homicides.

In King County, they comprised 5.5% (74 out of 1,358) of homicide deaths over a 17-year period from 2000 to 2017.
Sex and Age Distribution

- Males 31 (42%)
- Female 43 (58%)
- Differs from young homicide victims in that women are more likely to be killed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>8</td>
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# Sex and Racial Breakdown

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<tbody>
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<td>White</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
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# Place of Injury or Death

<table>
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<th>Place of injury or death</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Died at home</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Died outdoors</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing home</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found in cars</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel room</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas station, bar, grocery store, workplace</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unknown location</td>
<td>2</td>
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# Types of Injuries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of injury</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blunt force injury</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunshot wounds</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stab wounds</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asphyxia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homicidal violence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Objects used included—

- Hammers
- Hatchets
- Axes
- Fists and feet
- Shopping cart
- Decedent pushed, striking head to ground

WARNING – Next slides show graphic images.
Blunt Force Head Injury

- 72-year-old female found deceased in her home
- Blood was noted on her bed and spattered on the wall
- The body exhibited extensive cranial trauma on the posterior skull; two small skull fragments were found near her head
- Numerous contusions were observed along her neck, shoulders, and hands
This 73-year-old female was attacked by her husband while at home.

She was taken to the hospital and died shortly after arrival.

Her husband committed suicide before he could be arrested for her death.
Hammer

- The weapon used to assault her was a hammer.
- The hammer was placed against the wounds for tool markings.
- She suffered multiple blunt force injuries of the head, neck, torso, and extremities.
Homicide Demographics

- Whites more likely to die of blunt force injuries than any other race
- Females more than males
- Reflects national studies that show more individuals died of blunt force injuries compared to other modes of death
- In this series, 9 homicides involved murder/suicide, 8 involving spouses, and 1 involving a son and mother
- The females were the homicide victims in all cases
Gunshot Wounds

- A large number of individuals died as a result of firearm injuries, second only to blunt force injuries.

- White females were more likely to die of gunshot wound violence than any other group of people (13 out of 21, 62%).

- White males were second most likely to die by this method of death (8 out of 21, 38%).
Case Example

- 88-year-old female, reported to have been shot by her son, with whom she resides.
- Son had been distraught over recent job loss.
- Decedent found lying face up at home.
- Gunshot wound was observed on the decedent’s chest.
- Perforating heart and lung.
Stab Wounds

- 15 individuals died via this method, representing 20% of the study population
- Demographics included 6 females and 9 males
- 8 died in their homes, while 7 others were away from home
65-year-old male stabbed by an unknown assailant while eating at a restaurant

Assailant reportedly approached the decedent from behind, pulled out a knife, and stabbed him in the neck and back

There was no reported interaction between the decedent and the suspect prior to the incident
84-year-old male stabbed at home by family member
Taken to the hospital and later died
Died of multiple stab wounds of the torso
70-year-old male stabbed multiple times during the course of an attempted robbery in his apartment.

Suffered multiple stab and incised wounds of the neck.
Asphyxia

- Reported to be a relatively less common mode of death in comparison to firearm, sharp force, or blunt force injuries

- 4 people died via this method

- Mechanical asphyxia accounted for 1 and strangulation accounted for the other 3
Elderly couple found deceased in their home

Examination of the decedents revealed ligature marks around their necks, facial congestion and petechial hemorrhage around the eyes and in the conjunctive

Neck examination revealed soft tissue hemorrhage in necks and fracture of the hyoid bone and thyroid cartilage in both victims
Other

Subcategory includes cases that had a combination of injuries involving—

- Blunt force injuries
- Stab wounds and asphyxiation
- Severely neglected elders

11 individuals in our data set fell into this category
Elder Abuse

- 90-year-old female living with family was taken to the hospital after reportedly being found down

- Found to have multiple pressure sores and Adult Protective Services notified

- Found to have sepsis due to decubitus ulcer
Homicidal Violence

- 72-year-old female killed by her husband
- Suffered multiple sharp force wounds of the head and torso
- No evidence of defense wounds
Conclusion

- Elderly population is projected to rise substantially by 2050, which will likely increase the victimization incidence on the elderly.

- Most elderly people are killed during the course of robbery and are more likely to die at home.

- Male elders are more likely to die at the hands of strangers.

- Female elders are more likely to die at the hands of family members.
References

- United States Census Bureau http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/kingcountywashington/PS T045216
- Aging and Disability Services, Age–related population data, Aging in King County http://www.agingkingcounty.org/data–reports/age.related–population–data/
Part II: Investigation and Research of Sexual Homicide

Linking Offender Characteristics to Victim and Crime Scene Attributes
Suzanne H. Skrzelewski faces charges of second-degree murder, domestic assault and elderly abuse in the death of Longina Skrzelewski, who was 85.
EASTON, Pa. - A judge convicted a 73-year-old woman of first-degree murder Wednesday for killing her older neighbor with 37 hammer blows to the head and sentenced her to life in prison without parole.

Kathy MacClellan declined to speak on her own behalf before receiving her sentence and rocked in her chair as the judge imposed it.

She was found guilty of attacking 84-year-old Marguerite “Tuddy” Eyer with the claw end of a hammer on Feb. 7, 2005, in a mobile home community north of Bethlehem, which is about 45 miles north of Philadelphia.

Eyer identified MacClellan as her killer before she died in the emergency room, and police testified that MacClellan’s face, hair and clothing had been covered in Eyer’s blood. Prosecutors did not discuss a motive.

"Your conduct cannot be discounted because of your age," Judge Emil Giordano told MacClellan.

MacClellan had been scheduled to plead guilty Monday to third-degree murder in exchange for a sentence of 17 to 39 years in prison. But the judge ordered a nonjury trial after she refused to agree to the facts of the case as laid out by Northampton County District Attorney John Morganelli.

MacClellan had earlier waived her right to a jury trial when prosecutors decided not to seek the death penalty.

MacClellan told police she went to Eyer’s house with cookies and a photo album and found her bleeding on the floor, authorities said. She said she got on top of Eyer and moved her arm around because she thought that would comfort her, and got Eyer’s blood on her, according to testimony.

The defense did not put on a case. Defense attorneys Anthony Martino and Mark Minotti declined to comment after the sentencing.
Man kills elderly wife in murder-suicide at Pennsylvania hospice, DA says

By M. Alex Johnson, staff writer, NBC News

An 83-year-old woman and her husband were found shot to death in her hospice room Tuesday in what authorities in Allentown, Pa., were investigating as a murder-suicide.

Lehigh County District Attorney Jim Martin said there were no witnesses to the incident at Lehigh Valley Hospital. He said the man apparently shot and killed his wife and then killed himself.

The shooting was confined to the room, and "no other patients or staff were placed in jeopardy," Martin said in a statement after the bodies were found about 1 p.m. ET.

"Contrary to some rumors, this was not an active shooter situation," he said.

Authorities wouldn't identify the couple because their family hadn't been notified.

Chuck Lewis, senior vice president of Lehigh Valley Health Network, which operates the facility, confirmed that the dead woman was an inpatient in the hospice unit.
Where do we start?  
Who are we looking for?

No witnesses
Not high-risk victims
No enemies
Not gang- or drug-related killing
No jealous boyfriends or love triangle
Not a domestic killing
Not for insurance or inheritance
What difficult problem do we have to overcome?
Sexual Assault Perception

Motivated by sexual arousal and desire
THEORIES OF OFFENDING
Psychodynamic interpretation of rape

Groth – female represents authority figure who needs to be controlled, hurt & degraded

Pollack – acting out of motives of rage and sadistic intent
What motivates these offenders??

Power and Control

Vulnerable and Accessible

- Live alone
- Lack physical size and strength
- Less capable of fleeing or resisting
- Lack guardianship
- How does this affect risk?
ELDER WOMEN IN STUDY

128 murdered
Mean age – 77
Widowed and live alone – 83%
Homicide in residence – 94%
White (over represented) – 87%
Black – 9%
Hispanic – 4%
Lived in neighborhood 10+ years – 73%
No home security – 81%
Residence unsecured – 60%
S.F. killer admits to 4 more slayings / Convict demands death sentence in return for detailing other attacks on elderly

By Jaxon Van Derbeken  Published 4:00 am, Sunday, March 30, 2003

Homicide Inspector Armand Gordon
What information will help solve these cases?
Offender Attributes

- Race
- Age
- Relationship with victim
- Distance to victim’s residence
Sample Populations

**Offenders**
- Total - 110
- White - 48 (44%)
- Black - 46 (42%)
- Hispanic - 14
- Other - 2

**Victims**
- Total - 128
- White - 111 (87%)
- Black - 11 (8.6%)
- Hispanic - 5
- Asian - 1
OFFENDER RACE

Racial Composition of the Neighborhood
## Homicide Offenders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elderly Sexual</th>
<th>UCR 2010</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black----------------</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White----------------</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic-------------</td>
<td>13%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Cause of Death

- **Firearm** - 67%  
- **Strangulation** - 1%

### Black intra-racial

- 94%  
- 23%

### White intra-racial

- 85%  
- 96%
Cross-racial Homicide

Hispanic - 80%
Black - 77%
White - 4% (anomaly)
What does this tell us?

Victim is Black - offender is Black

Victim is Hispanic - offender likely Hispanic

Victim is White - CANNOT use race

Victim is White - use neighborhood comp
Offender Age

Ranged from 15 to 58 years
Crime Scene Predictors

Homicide Injury Scale

Victim’s state of dress (covered or not)
Homicide Injury Scale

- Codes severity of injuries related to COD
- Ordinal scale – 1 to 6
- 5 and 6 equal “excessive injury”
- Hispanics most severe injury (small N)
- Half of 5 and 6 by offenders 15-24
- Mean = 4.6
- Highly correlated with ISS
The more severe the injuries, the younger the offender

The more injury, the closer he lives
Distance from Offender’s Residence to Crime

30% lived on same block
56% lived within 6 blocks of crime scene
Journey of the crime
Distance from Offender’s Residence to Crime

What predicts:
Homicide Injury Scale (HIS)
Racial composition of neighborhood

Offender walked to scene – 81%
Blacks – 93%
Hispanics – 85%
Whites – 69%

Higher % than offenders living within 6 blocks (56%)
Relationship Continuum

“Relative or Apparent” Stranger
Victim - Offender Relationship

These women are targeted

Large grey area between stranger and non-stranger

Large category of “apparent” stranger
Victim - Offender Relationship

Predictor – How victim was left at scene

Covered – known to victim

Greater probability he lives closer
Foreign Object Insertion

Present in 22% of cases
Whites most likely
Hispanics least likely
Under 18 years - 33%
< 24 years of age - 50%
Do They Torture?
General Offender Characteristics

Live within 6 blocks – 56%

Live on same block – 30%

Hispanics living within 6 blocks – 85%

Unskilled – 93%

Mean age – 27
White - 28
Black - 27
Hispanic - 25

Education
20% 1–8
74% 9–12
## General Offender Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criminal records</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only 20% - sex offense arrests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel on foot</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seem present</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brought nothing</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon from scene</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blitz approach</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives with family</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
93% have history of abuse

- 86% -- alcohol abuse
- 54% -- marijuana abuse
- 44% -- cocaine abuse

70% under influence during crime – self reported
General Offender Characteristics

Confessed – 45%

Whites confessed twice as often as Blacks

Made admissions – 19%

Blacks made admissions twice as often as Whites
Confessions – What Works?

Remember that they are socially inadequate
Male interviewer
One on one
Remove items between you
Soft approach – personable
Empathetic – be understanding

Themes
Financial gain motive
She was the aggressor
Project fault to victim

- CRITICAL -
DO NOT talk about sexual assault
Organized – Disorganized Typology

- Continuum of behavior
- Assist law enforcement
- Classify offenders based on CS attributes
Disorganized
Overall impression of scene

Committed suddenly
No plan for deterring detection
Great disarray
Spontaneous, symbolic, unplanned quality
Kills instantly for control
Uses blitz attack
Victim caught unaware (sleeping)
Restraints not used
Weapon of opportunity from victim or scene
Disorganized

Overall impression of scene

- Body left at or near scene
- COD often strangulation or BFT
- Depersonalization
- Mutilation after death
- Specific areas of body targeted
- “Overkill”
- Crime scene and death scene usually same
- No attempt to conceal body
- Not evidence conscious - Forensic E present
Disorganized
Profile Characteristics

Average intelligence
Socially immature
Poor work history
Sexually incompetent
Lives alone or with family
Lives or works near crime scene
Minimal interest in news media
Societal aversion
Feels rejected and lonely
Finds interpersonal relationships difficult
Lacks cunning
Commits crime in a frenzy
Social outcast
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Director
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Bibliography


QUESTIONS & SUGGESTIONS
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