



Physical Anthropology Section – 2011

H42 Demographic Differences of Homicide Victims Examined by Forensic Anthropologists in Comparison to National Homicide Victim Trends

Alma Koon, BS, 731 Pond Branch Road, Lexington, SC 29073; and Katherine E. Weisensee, PhD*, Clemson University, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, 132 Brackett Hall, Clemson, SC 29634*

After attending this presentation, attendees will appreciate differences in demographic parameters, regional differences, and temporal changes between homicide victims examined by forensic anthropologists and national homicide statistics.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by informing practitioners of the unique demographic profile of homicide victims examined by forensic anthropologists in comparison with national homicide trends.

This study examines the demographic parameters of individuals that were victims of homicide, examined by forensic anthropologists, and reported to the Forensic Data Bank (FDB). The FDB is a centralized database to which forensic anthropologists from around the country report information from recent cases. The data used in this study contains individuals that were examined by forensic anthropologists between 1961 and 1991. By virtue of the fact that individuals in the databank were examined by forensic anthropologists, the postmortem interval of the average homicide victim in the databank is longer in comparison to other homicide victims. This is because forensic anthropologists are typically involved in cases where individuals are partially to completely decomposed, and when identification through other methods is not feasible. The sex ratio, age, and ancestry of individuals in the FDB is compared with national homicide statistics in order to determine if the demographic profile of individuals examined by forensic anthropologists is unique in comparison to national homicide trends.

Preliminary results of the demographic characteristics of homicide victims show that 53% of homicide victims in the FDB are female, in comparison to national statistics where females make-up only 24% of homicide victims. In addition, the mean age of individuals in the FDB is 28.3 years, while nationally the mean age of homicide victims is 33.8 years. Finally, in the FDB, 65.8% of homicide victims were reported as White, 22.6% as Black, and 11.6% as other. Nationally, the ancestry profile of homicide victims is 52.9% White, 45.3% Black, and 1.7% other. In addition to these preliminary results, the FDB will be compared to national trends to examine changes over time in the demographic parameters of the two samples. Also explored is the regional variation in order to determine if there are differences in FDB demographic parameters in different areas of the country.

These preliminary results suggest that in general, homicide victims that are examined by forensic anthropologists are more likely to be female than other homicide victims. Moreover, they are somewhat younger and more likely to be White in comparison to other homicide victims. Given that the main difference between individuals in the FDB compared to other homicide victims is that FDB individuals have a longer postmortem interval, a number of possible causes for these differences are explored. The clear female-bias in the FDB suggests that female victims of homicide are more likely to be concealed following death and the period between death and discovery is longer for females. Furthermore, the results suggest that female victims of homicide are more often killed in private settings, perhaps related to sexual violence associated with the homicide, and therefore there is a longer period until the body is discovered. Social theory research on intimate partner homicide and violence against women will be used to contextualize the results of this comparison.

Homicide, Demographics, Comparison