



### A131 Beyond the Biological Profile: Demographic Patterns in Forensic Anthropology Casework in Honolulu, Hawaii

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand demographic patterns of forensic anthropological casework in Hawaii.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating how public health issues can affect patterns in forensic anthropology casework and, conversely, how forensic anthropologists can provide information germane to public administration officials.

Few published studies have previously examined regional demographic patterns within forensic anthropology casework. Hypothetically, these types of analyses may reveal insights into how forensic anthropology casework patterns are reflective of regional conditions. The forensic anthropology case files for the City and County of Honolulu provide an informative illustration of this phenomenon. In 2015, the Governor of the State of Hawaii declared homelessness a public health emergency associated with the lack of affordable housing. In accordance with nationwide epidemiological statistics, people who experience homelessness tend to have a variety of health issues, ranging from physical to mental. This presentation examines 15 years of forensic anthropology casework from the City and County of Honolulu, Department of the Medical Examiner, to illustrate the use of forensic case files as a source of information on the embodied osseous consequences of the homelessness crisis. Importantly, these data have the potential to provide demographic and other information regarding marginalized or otherwise forgotten members of society.

For the purposes of this study, the Honolulu Medical Examiner's Office granted access to their database of all the cases ( $n=27$ ) that involved a forensic anthropology consultation from 2004 to 2018. The cases were coded for elements of the biological profile, specifically sex, age, ancestry, and antemortem trauma. They were further coded based on the medical examiner's conclusions of manner of death. Lastly, if personal identity was determined, then additional information was coded for the decedent's residency and/or homelessness status, mental illness(es), and drug abuse/use. Documented chronological age at death superseded biological age estimates.

The results suggest that known public health issues likely affect patterns in forensic anthropology casework in the City and County of Honolulu. The highest frequencies by category were males (70%), middle-aged from 35 to 55 years (46%), and of European or mixed-European descent (65%). Approximately one-third (37%) of individuals had antemortem trauma, ranging from healed toes to noses. Manner of death was classified as undetermined for most (75%) of the cases; the second most common classification was suicide (19%). Approximately 70% of the cases were personally identified. Among the identified, 42% were known to have experienced homelessness at the time of their death. Based on the circumstances under which their remains were found, more than one-third (38%) of the unidentified were likely to have experienced homelessness at the time of their death. All the people whose remains were personally identified and who were known to have experienced homelessness also had histories of either mental illness, drug abuse, or both. Approximately half (55%) of the people whose remains were personally identified and who were not experiencing homelessness, had either a documented mental illness, mental degenerative disease, and/or a history of drug abuse.

Synthesis of data extracted from forensic anthropology case files provides fine-grained information regarding a subset of people who were marginalized in life and is potentially useful to public planners. This study suggests that marginalized people are more likely than the average person to become the subject of forensic anthropology cases. From this perspective, the lesions inscribed in the remains of people who become the subject of forensic anthropology casework provide evidence of the types of systematic oppression that they experienced during life. The results also suggest that people who experienced homelessness or were otherwise marginalized at the time of their deaths may also experience a postmortem erasure of identity that is only partially recoverable through the development of biological profiles. Thus, this is a social justice alert to public administration officials and the community at large that not only are people who experience homelessness at risk of a multitude of injustices in life, but they also face injustice in death by the loss of their personal identity and untold stories.

#### Forensic Anthropology, Hawaii, Homelessness