Infant Homicide

The infant homicide rate increased from 4.3 per 100,000 in 1970 to 9.2 per 100,000 in 2000, before declining to 7.9 per 100,000 in 2010.

Importance

Homicide accounts for one in five injury-related deaths among infants (under one year of age) in the United States.\(^1\) Infants are most likely to be killed by their mother during the first week of life, but thereafter are more likely to be killed by a male (usually their father or stepfather).\(^2\) The risk of infant homicide is highest on the day of birth, and half of all infant homicides occur by the fourth month of life. Homicide risk is greater in the first year of life than in any other year of childhood before age 17.\(^3\)

Research studies of infant death data drawn from multiple agencies (such as police or social service records) indicate that the actual rate of deaths attributable to abuse or neglect of infants and children up to four years old is more than twice as high as the official rates reported in death certificate data.\(^4\) Better reporting of the circumstances surrounding infant fatalities would improve the quality of death certificate records. Studies have also indicated that a substantial but uncertain number of unreported infant homicide deaths may occur among very young infants, particularly those infants for whom no birth or death certificates are found, such as those who are born with no trained attendants and not in a clinical setting.\(^5\)

Key risk factors associated with infant homicides include the circumstances surrounding the birth of the child. Among homicides occurring on the first day of life, 95 percent of the victims were not born in a hospital.\(^6\) Other important maternal risk factors include a second or subsequent infant born to an unmarried teenage mother (19 years of age or younger); no prenatal visit before the sixth month of pregnancy or no prenatal care; a history of maternal mental illness; a mother with 12 or fewer years of education; and premature birth (gestation of less than 28 weeks).\(^7\) Studies suggest that male caretakers (fathers or mothers’ intimate partners), often acting impulsively, are the perpetrators of the majority of infant homicides.\(^8\) However, there is generally less information (including potential risk factors for infant homicide) on biological fathers than there is on mothers, because of the frequency with which birth certificates are missing paternal data.

Trends

Between 1970 and 2000, the official infant homicide rate more than doubled, from 4.3 to 9.2 infant deaths per 100,000 children under age one. Between 2000 and 2002, the rate declined to 7.6 per 100,000, and has since fluctuated between 7.4 and 8.4 per 100,000. The rate was 7.9 per 100,000 in 2010. (Figure...
1) Differences by Gender

In most years, males have been more likely than females to be killed during the first year of life. In 2010, for example, the infant homicide rate for boys was 8.8 per 100,000 children under age one, and 6.9 for girls. This gap has generally widened since 1970. (Figure 2)

Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin

Black infants are substantially more at risk for homicide than are other infants. In 2010, the homicide rate for black infants was 14.1 per 100,000, while Hispanic and white infants had rates of 6.8 and 7.1 per 100,000, respectively. However, the rate for black infants has decreased greatly since 1990, when it was at 24.5 per 100,000. (Figure 3)

State and Local Estimates


Both WISQARS and WONDER are maintained by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

International Estimates

None available.

National Goals

Through its Healthy People 2020 initiative, the federal government has set several related goals. These include reducing the rate of infant deaths from 6.7 per 1,000 live births in 2006 to 6.0 per 1,000 in 2020. Subgoals include a reduction of the rate of neonatal deaths (within the first 28 days of life) from 4.5 per 1,000 live birth in 2006 to 4.1 per 1,000 in 2020, and a reduction in the rate of post-neonatal deaths from 2.2 per 1,000 live births in 2006 to 2.0 per 1,000 in 2020. Additionally, there is a goal to reduce child
maltreatment-related deaths from 2.4 to 2.2 per 100,000 children under 18.


Related Indicators


Definition

Infant homicides are classified as deaths purposefully inflicted by other persons on children less than one year old. Data on infant homicide are developed by the National Center for Health Statistics, drawn from death certificates recorded by local medical examiners or coroners and reported to the National Vital Statistics System. These records code infant deaths using the injury classification framework developed by the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) codes, 9th and 10th editions.

For more information about ICD codes see: [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/icd10fct.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/icd10fct.pdf)

A small number of stillbirths may be incorrectly classified as infant homicides. Medical examiners usually will attribute a death to infanticide only when they can rule out other causes (i.e., autopsy evidence indicates that respiration had occurred, no evidence indicates death from natural causes, and circumstantial evidence is consistent with homicide).[10]

Data Sources


Raw Data Source

National Vital Statistics System

[http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss.htm) per 1,000 for children ages 16 to 17. (Figure 2)
### Appendix 1: Homicide Rates for Infants Under 1 Year (per 100,000), by Gender, Race, and Hispanic Origin, Selected Years 1970-2010

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1 Methods for computing homicide rates were changed in 1999; these 1998 rates have been modified so they are comparable to the 1999 and 2000 rates.

2 Starting in the year 2000, estimates were revised based on 2000 decennial census data. Previous estimates were calculating using 1990 decennial census data as the base. Because of this, there are two different estimates for the year 2000, one based on 1990 decennial census data and the other based on 2000 decennial census data.


Endnotes


[9] Hispanics may be of any race. Totals for whites and blacks do not include Hispanics.