

Ottawa Homicide Project

A REVIEW OF CASES FROM 2010-2020

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Our team respectfully acknowledges that we live, work, and gather on the traditional and unceded territories of the Algonquin People.

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CONTENT WARNING

This report includes sensitive content. No individual cases are discussed, but homicide trends from 2010-2020 are identified. If you experience distress or if you have lost a loved one to homicide and would like additional support, consider contacting the following resources:

- **Ottawa Victim Services** www.ovs-svo.com • 613-238-2762
- **Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime** www.crcvc.ca • 1-877-232-2610
- **The Distress Centre of Ottawa** www.dcottawa.on.ca • 613-238-3311

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**Victims and
Survivors of
Crime Week**



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et survivants
d'actes criminels**



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HIGHLIGHTS

PREVALENCE

- Ottawa is one of the safest large cities in Canada with a homicide rate of **1.19** per 100,000 in 2019.
- From 2010-2020, Ottawa recorded **126** homicide cases.
- In 2016, there was a spike in homicides with **24** cases; however, the numbers have declined since and the 2019 homicide rate (1.19 per 100,000) was lower than the rate in 2010 (1.38 per 100,000).

GENDER

- Men are **overrepresented** in Ottawa's homicide numbers and were **3.3 times** more likely than women to die by homicide.
- From 2010-2020, the number of male victims of homicide **trended up**, while the number of female victims **trended down**.
- Women (n = 20) were **2 times** more likely than men (n = 10) to be killed by a partner or family member.
- Cases where women were killed by a partner (n = 10) have declined significantly, with 9 cases occurring from 2010-2015, and a single case from 2016-2020.

AGE

- **38%** of homicide victims (n = 48) were aged **20-29**.
- Still, the majority of homicide victims were **aged 30 or older**.
- Younger people were more likely to die by street violence, while older people were more likely to be killed by a partner or family member.

ETHNOCULTURAL BACKGROUND

- Homicide disproportionately affects Ottawa's racialized communities.
- People who are Black or Middle Eastern represent **16.1%** of Ottawa's total population (2016 Census) but accounted for **45%** of homicide victims (n = 57).

GEOGRAPHY

- Cases are not evenly distributed across the city but tend to be clustered.
- **65%** of cases (n = 85) occurred in just 9 postal codes; of those, **30%** of cases (n = 38) occurred in three postal codes, and of those, **15%** of cases (n = 19) occurred in a single postal code.

SUSPECTS

- In most cases, the suspect was known to the victim and was similar in age (+/- 10 years) and ethnocultural background.
- Ages varied most in cases of family violence involving a parent and child.

UNSOLVED CASES

- **83%** of cases (n = 105) from 2010-2020 have been solved by the Ottawa Police, while **17%** (n = 21) remain unsolved.
- Of the unsolved cases, 95% involve a male victim (n = 20), 86% involve a firearm (n = 18), and 86% involve a victim from a racialized community (n = 18).

REVIEW OF HOMICIDE CASES (2010-2020)

Purpose

Every homicide is a tragedy for a family and our community. This report provides an overview of homicide cases in Ottawa from 2010-2020. It is intended to inform community stakeholders about patterns and evolving trends to assist with planning prevention and meeting the needs of people affected by homicide.

Methods

The analysis was conducted by reviewing media reports of all homicides in Ottawa from 2010-2020. Cases were added to a spreadsheet where key information was collected on each homicide, including the age, gender, and ethnocultural backgrounds of victims and known suspects, the locations of each offence, the use of a weapon, and other contextual data such as the relationship between the victim and suspect. Our dataset was then independently verified by two Staff Sergeants with the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) to ensure that our information was aligned with police records. Following this verification, addresses for each case were uploaded into ArcGIS to develop crime maps for geographic analysis.

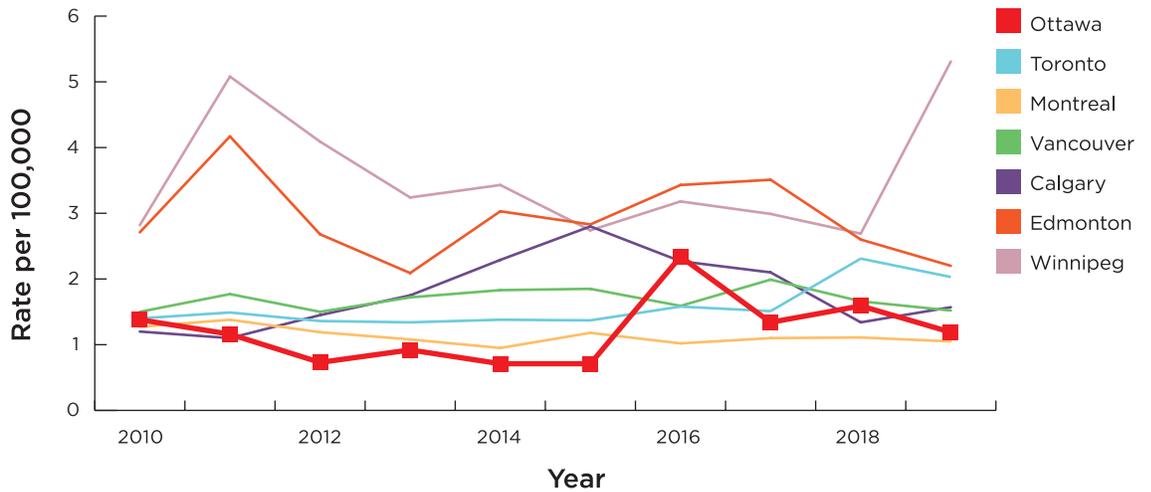
Findings

Our findings include information on prevalence, demographics, context, partner and family homicide, weapons, geography, characteristics of suspects, and unsolved cases.

1. PREVALENCE

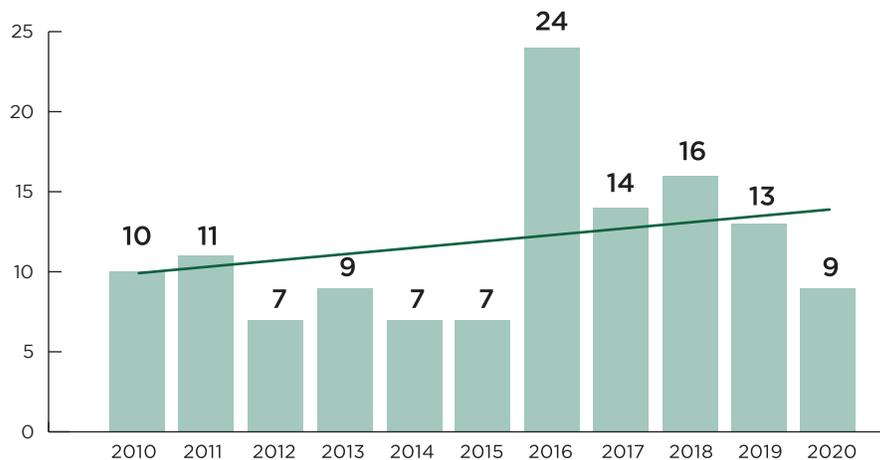
Ottawa is one of the safest large cities in Canada. In 2019, the homicide rate in Ottawa was 1.19 per 100,000. This rate was lower than Canada’s rate of 1.8 per 100,000 and Toronto’s rate of 2.03 per 100,000. Between 2010 and 2020, there were 126 victims of homicide in Ottawa. In 2016, there was a spike in homicides with 24 cases; however, the number of homicides has declined since and the 2019 homicide rate (1.19 per 100 000) was lower than the rate in 2010 (1.38 per 100 000). 2016 was the only year where Ottawa’s homicide rate exceeded the national rate. Homicide rates help to contextualize the actual number of homicides with the city’s growing population.

Figure 1. 2010-2019 Homicide rates per 100,000



The actual number of homicides in Ottawa has been on the rise. Prior to the spike in homicide cases reported in Ottawa in 2016, the city averaged 8.5 homicides per year from 2010-2015. The 24 cases recorded in 2016 represented the sharpest increase in homicide rates Ottawa had seen in decades (Nease, 2017). According to OPS statistics, the spike in homicides in 2016 was an anomaly with few to no factors linking multiple cases. However, OPS did conclude that gang affiliation accounted for a significant portion of Ottawa’s homicides in 2016, with the Guns & Gangs Unit processing 10 gang-related homicides (OPS, 2016, p. 43). From 2017-2020, homicide rates in Ottawa levelled out slightly but, with an average of 13 homicides per year, were still higher than the period spanning 2010-2015.

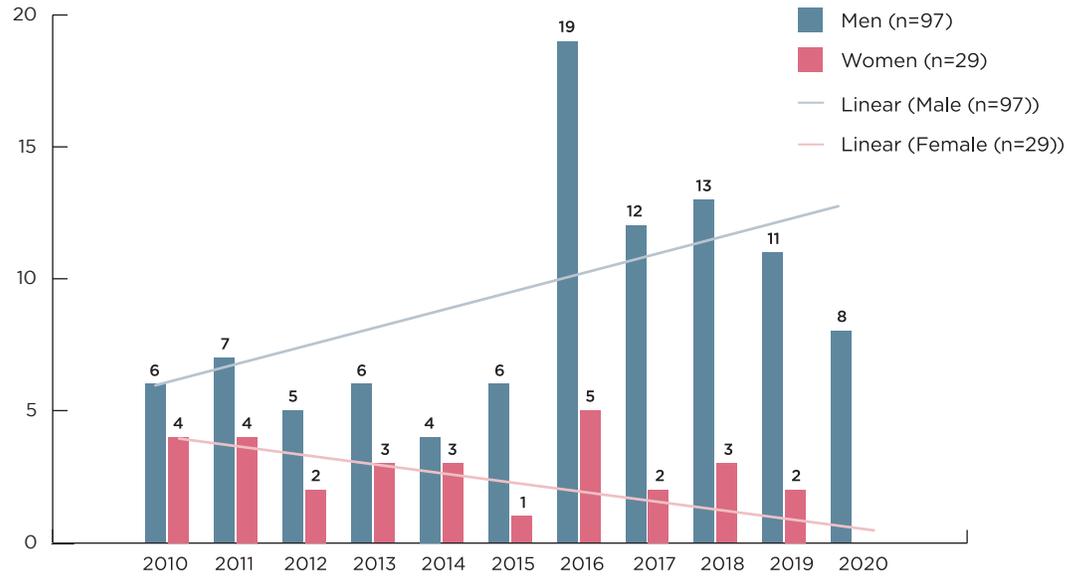
Figure 2. Total homicides per year with trendline (N = 126)



2. DEMOGRAPHICS

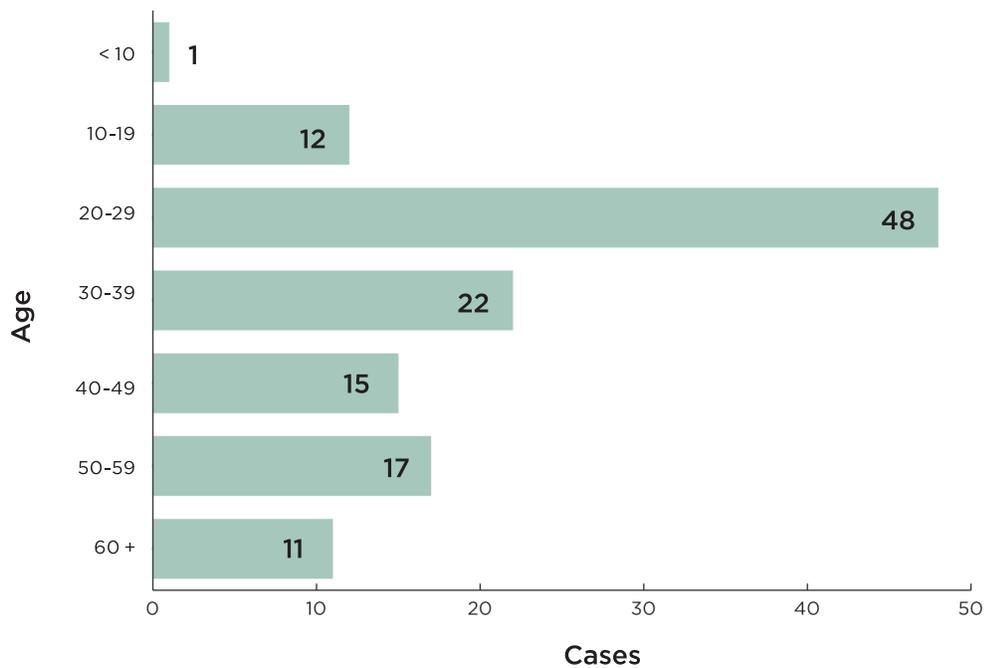
Men are overrepresented as victims of homicide. From 2010-2020, 77% of homicide victims were men (n = 97), and 23% were women (n = 29). Men were 3.3 times more likely than women to die by homicide. Trend lines for male and female homicide victims over the past 10 years show that overall, the number of male victims has trended upward, while the number of female victims has trended down.

Figure 3. Gender of homicide victims by year (N = 126)



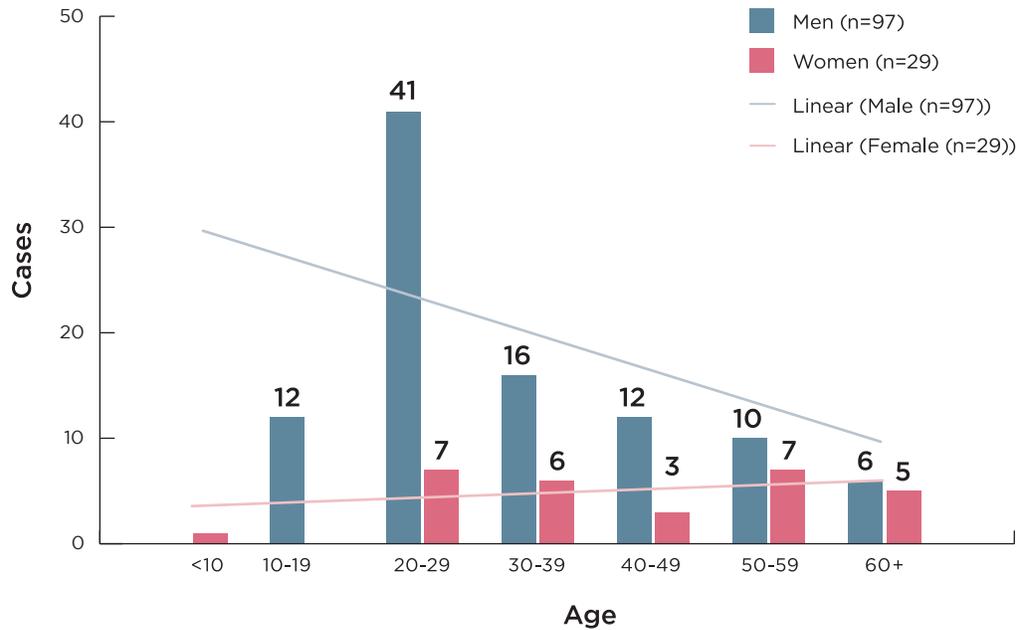
Age 20-29 was the most at risk of dying by homicide. Of the 126 homicide victims, 38% of all cases included victims who were between the ages of 20-29 (n = 48); still, 52% of all cases included victims who were aged 30 or older (n = 65). The average age of homicide victims was 35.4 (SD = 16.63).

Figure 4. Number of victims by age (N = 126)



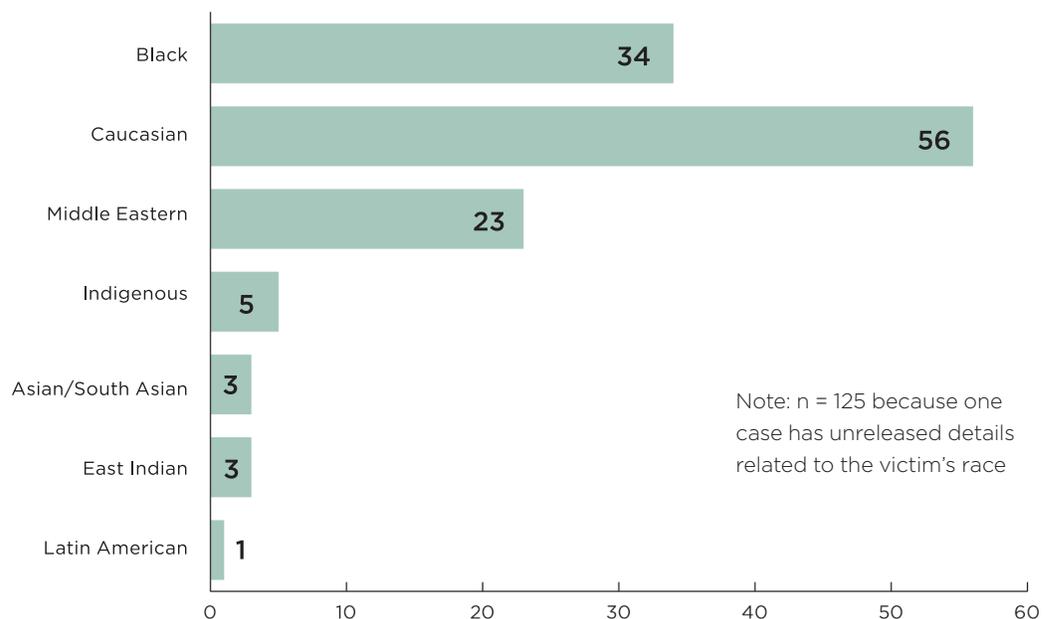
Young men were the most at risk of dying by homicide. One third (33%) of all homicide cases involved men aged 20-29 (n = 41), and 88% of homicide victims aged 10-29 were men (n = 53). For men, the risk of homicide decreased with age. For women, there was a slight increase with age; 72% of female homicide victims were aged 30 or older (n = 21).

Figure 5. Age and gender comparison (N = 126)



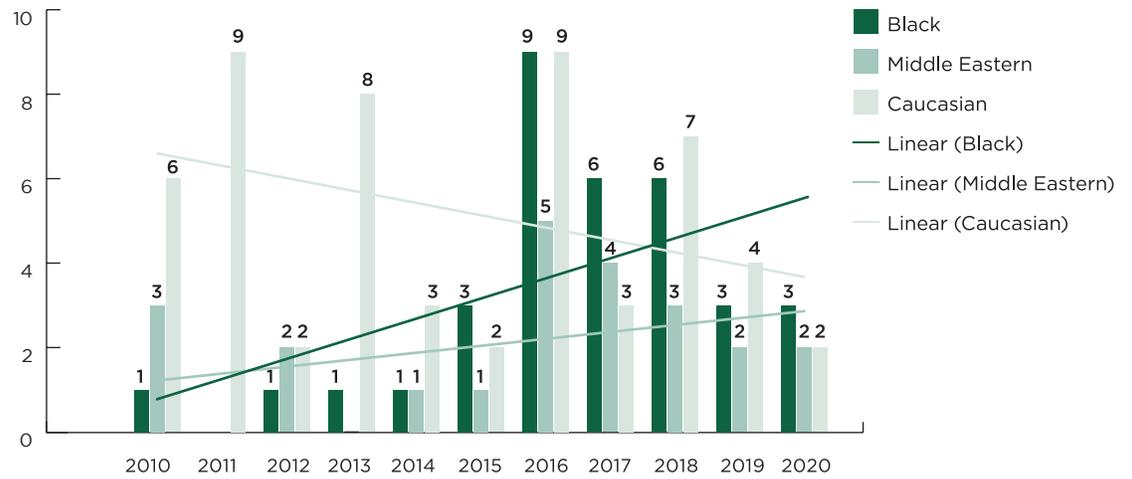
Homicide disproportionately affects racialized communities. Together, cases involving Black (n = 34), and Middle Eastern (n = 23) victims accounted for 45% of all cases (n = 57). Caucasian victims accounted for 44% (n = 56). Based on calculations using the 2016 census, Black people were 4.1 times overrepresented in Ottawa's homicide numbers, accounting for 27% of cases (n = 34), but just 6.6% of the population. Middle Eastern people were 1.9 times overrepresented, accounting for 18.5% of homicide cases (n = 23), but just 9.5% of the population. Of note, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples were not overrepresented, though it is possible that Indigenous identities were not noted in the data.

Figure 6. Race-based data, number of homicides (n = 125*)



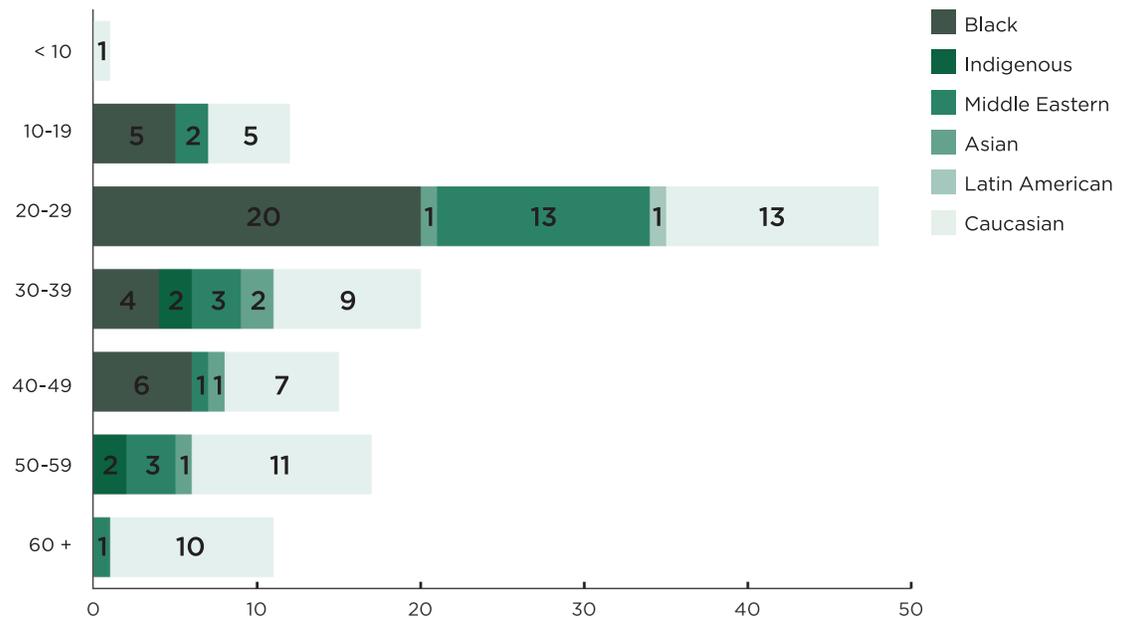
Homicides with Black and Middle Eastern victims are trending up. Although 44% of homicide victims in Ottawa from 2010-2020 were Caucasian (n = 56), these cases are trending down with a sharper increase in cases with victims who are Black or Middle Eastern.

Figure 7. Black, Middle Eastern, and Caucasian victims by year (N = 126)



Black and Middle Eastern people are more likely to die by homicide in their twenties. Three quarters (74%) of Black victims were under age 30 (n = 25) and 65% of Middle Eastern victims were under age 30 (n = 15). Conversely, 66% of Caucasian victims were age 30 or older (n = 37).

Figure 8. Age and race comparison (n = 125*)

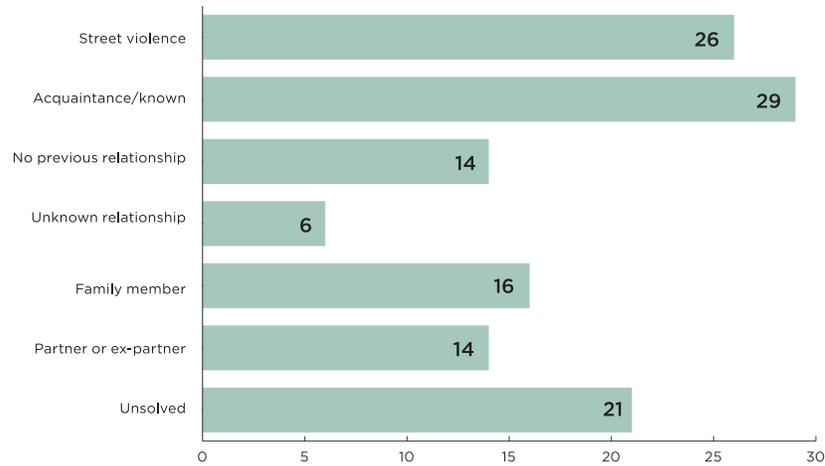


Note: n = 125 because one case has unreleased details related to the victim's race

3. CONTEXT

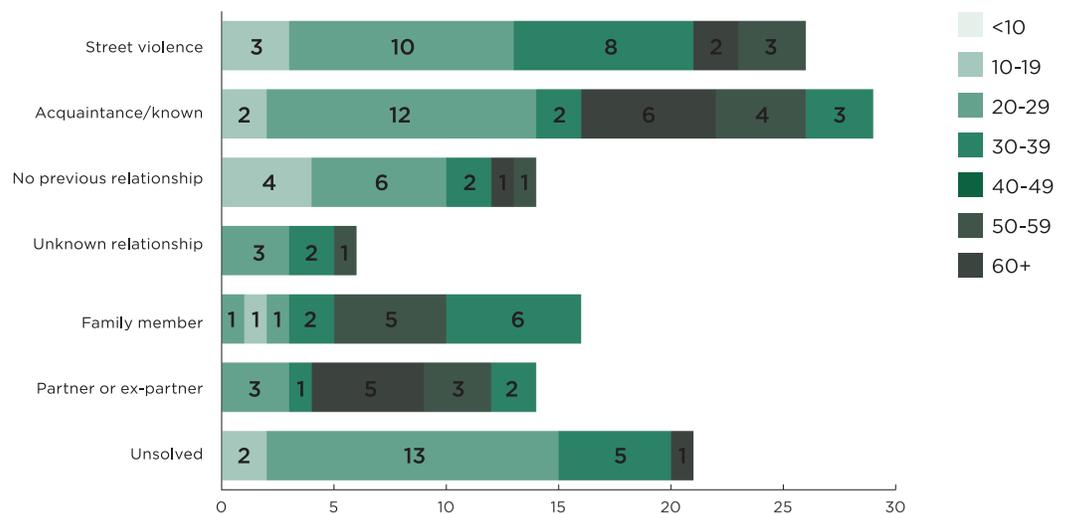
Most victims were killed by someone they knew. The majority of cases (n = 59) included an offender who was an acquaintance or someone known to the victim, such as a family member, partner, or ex-partner. Street violence accounted for 21% of cases (n = 26).

Figure 9. Context of violence (N = 126)



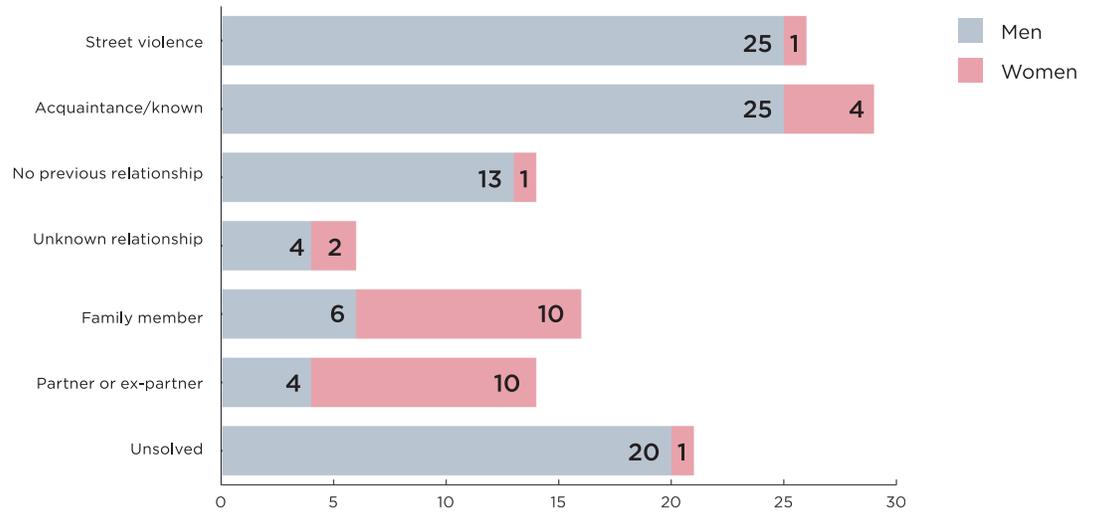
There are age differences in the types of homicide that occurred. Half of street violence homicides included victims under age 30 (50%, n = 13), and half included victims aged 30 or older (50%, n = 13). However, 81% of street violence homicides included a victim under age 40 (n = 21). Our analysis suggests that people aged 20-39 were most at risk of street violence homicide. Additionally, 95% of the unsolved cases involved a victim under age 40 (n = 20). Conversely, 55% of victims aged 60 or older were killed by a family member (n = 6).

Figure 10. Age and context (N = 126)



Men were more likely to die by street violence, while women were more likely to be killed by a partner or family member. Almost all of the solved cases of street violence (96%) involved a male victim (n = 25). Over two-thirds of women (69%) were killed by a family member, partner, or ex-partner (n = 20).

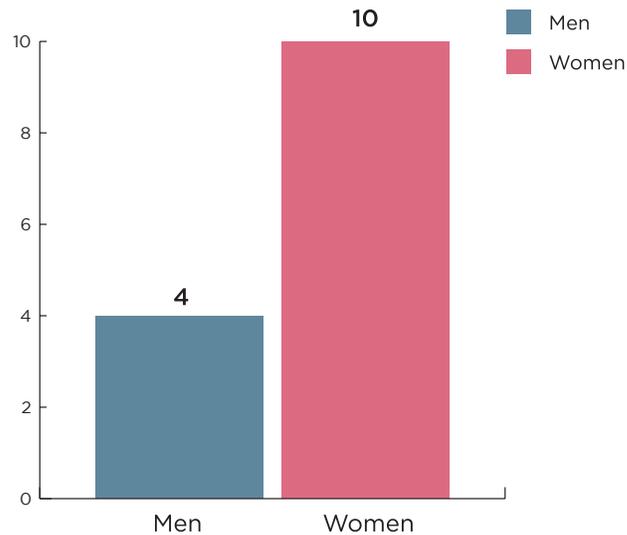
Figure 11. Gender and context (N = 126)



4. PARTNER AND FAMILY HOMICIDE

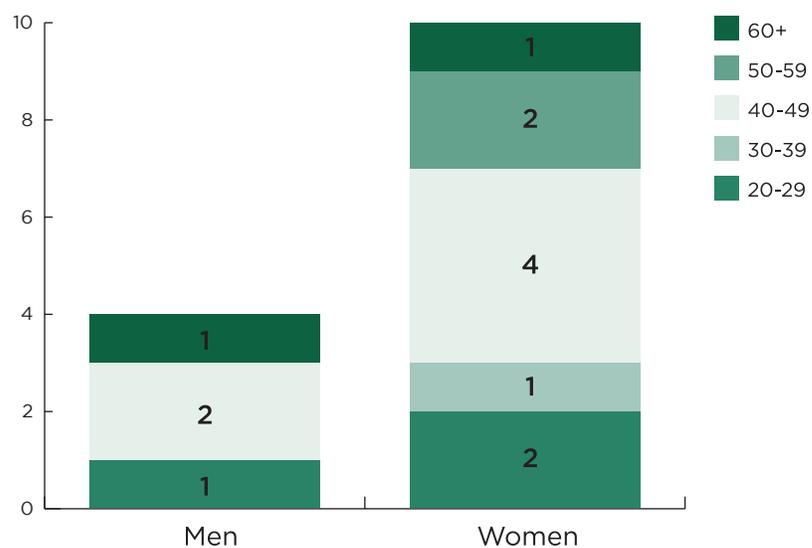
Women are more likely to be killed by a partner or ex-partner. Women (n = 10) were more than twice as likely as men (n = 4) to be killed by a partner or ex-partner. Across Canada, women account for 80% of victims in cases of partner homicide and die at a rate **4 times** higher than men (Sinha, 2015). Even so, four men were killed by their partner or ex-partner. These cases were complex and often involved an ex-partner's new boyfriend.

Figure 12. Gender and homicide by a partner or ex-partner (n = 14)



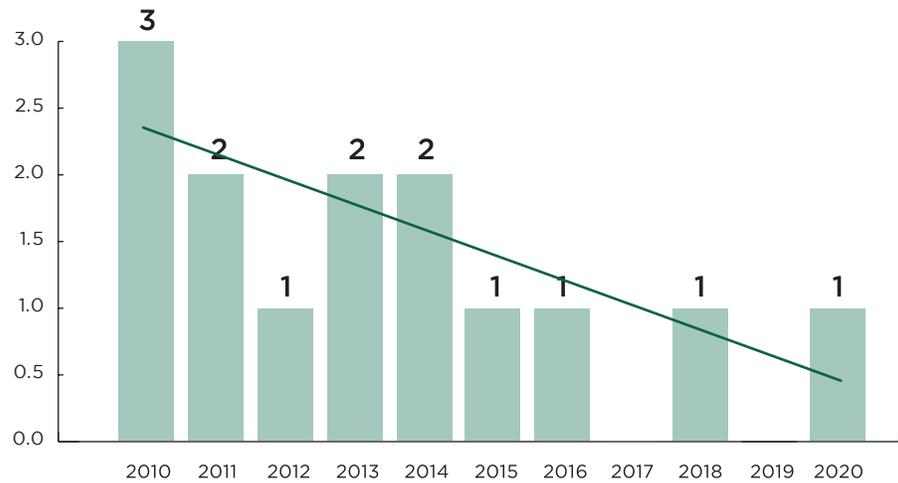
The risk of partner or ex-partner homicide was greatest for adults over age 40. More than two thirds of victims were aged 40 or older (71%, n = 10). The risk for women and men was highest between the ages of 40-49 (43%, n = 6); however, 29% of cases included a victim aged 50 or older (n = 4).

Figure 13. Gender and age of partner homicide victims (n = 14)



Homicides by a partner or ex-partner have been on the decline since 2010. Though Ottawa has experienced an average of 1.3 partner homicides per year over the last decade, overall IPV-related homicide in the city has shown a downward trend since it peaked in 2010, with 3 reported partner homicides that year.

Figure 14. Partner homicides per year with trendline (n = 14)



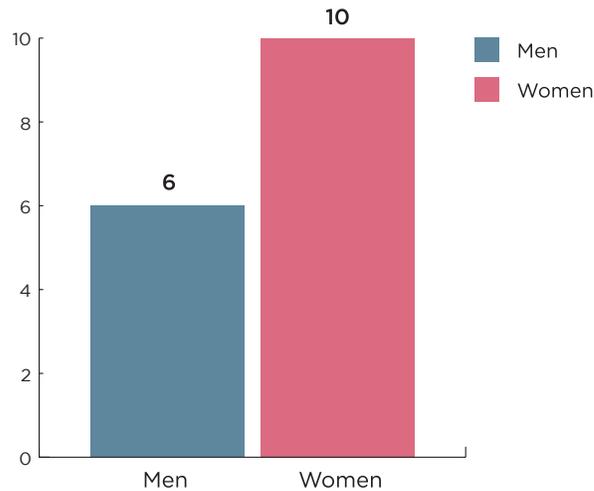
Partner or ex-partner homicides with female victims have declined. From 2010-2015, 9 women were killed by their partner, while from 2016-2020, there was a single case. The trend in cases with a male victim has remained rather constant from 2010-2020, with a single case every 3-4 years.

Figure 15. Partner homicides by gender per year with trendline (n = 14)



Women are nearly twice as likely as men to be killed by a family member. These cases involved parents, siblings, and in-laws who were killed by a family member. Women (n = 10) are almost twice as likely as men (n = 6) to be killed by a family member. 70% of women who were victims of family homicide were mothers killed by their sons or daughters (n = 7). 67% of men who were victims of family homicide were fathers killed by their sons or daughters (including in-laws; n = 4). Together, partner homicide and family homicide accounted for 25% of all cases (n = 31). Women were at an equal risk of being killed by a partner or family member, while men were more likely to be killed by a family member than a partner or ex-partner.

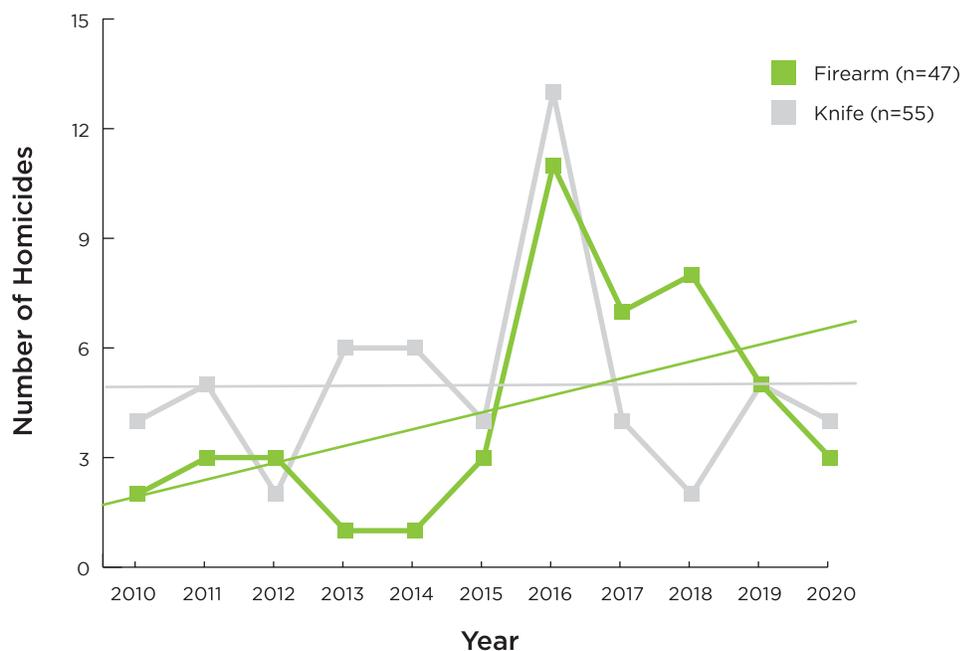
Figure 16. Gender and family homicide (n = 16)



5. WEAPONS

Upward trend in firearm use. Of the 126 cases of homicide, 81% were facilitated with a knife or firearm (n = 102). Of this, 54% of homicides were facilitated using a knife (n = 55), while the remaining 46% were facilitated using a firearm (n = 47). Between 2010-2020, the trend in knife-facilitated homicide has remained virtually constant. Conversely, firearm-facilitated homicide has trended up across the decade. Firearm-facilitated homicides spiked in 2016, but have steadily declined since in the following years.

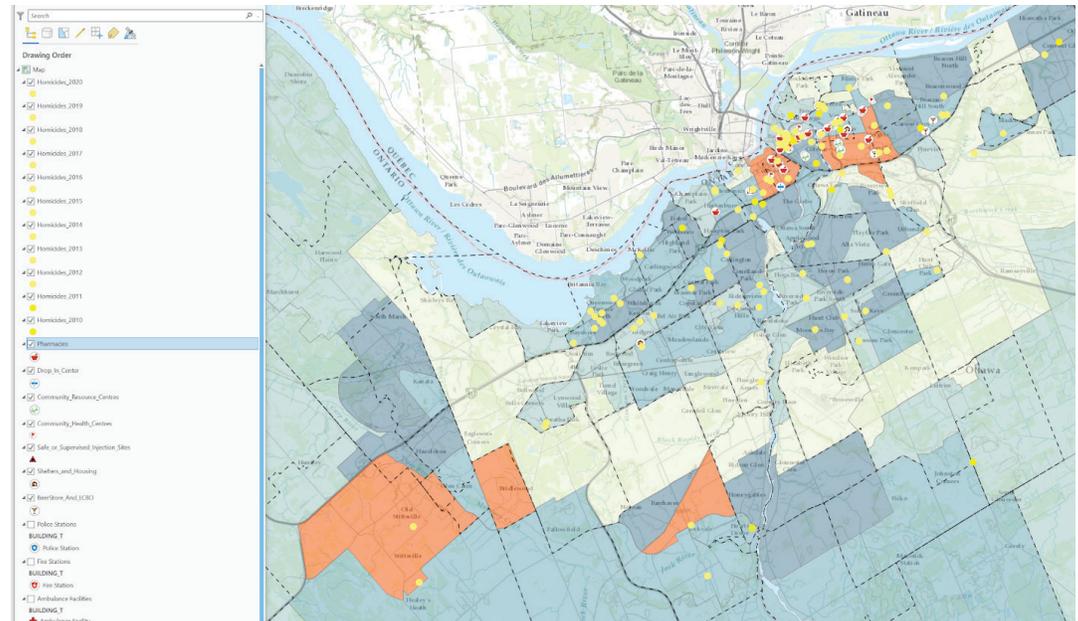
Figure 17. Weapon-facilitated homicide (n = 102)



6. GEOGRAPHY

Cases are not evenly distributed across the city, but tend to be clustered. Ottawa is divided into 42 postal codes. 65% of cases (n = 85) occurred in just 9 postal codes; of those, 30% of cases (n = 38) occurred in three postal codes, and of those, 15% of cases (n = 19) occurred in a single postal code.

Figure 18. ArcGIS map of Ottawa homicide cases from 2010-2020



Note: This map is not colour-coded by risk.

Some postal codes are more at risk for certain types of homicide. The K1N postal code of the Byward Market had the highest instances of homicide (15%, n = 19). This space is unique in Ottawa for the combination of three risk factors loosely associated with homicide:

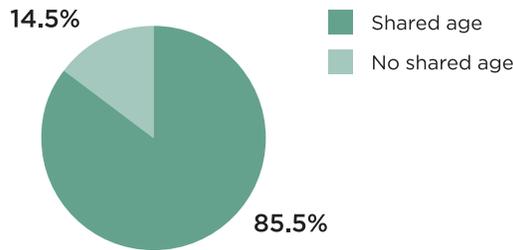
- Alcohol outlet density (Armstead et al., 2018; Naimi et al., 2016)
- People who are homeless are more vulnerable to homicide because they may not have access to secure private space (Hwang, 2000; Slockers et al., 2018)
- Violence associated with substance use (Miller et al., 2007; Stanley et al., 2016).

Based on our analysis, each of these factors was associated with 1-3 cases, including bar fights, fights between people who were homeless, or drug-related violence. Three cases involved an intoxicated person being removed from a shelter or bar and later attacking someone nearby. None of these risk factors contributed significantly to homicide rates on their own, but slightly increased the prevalence within the K1N postal code through their shared geography. We also note that for many of the cases in the K1N postal code, neither the victim nor the suspect lived in the neighbourhood.

7. SUSPECTS

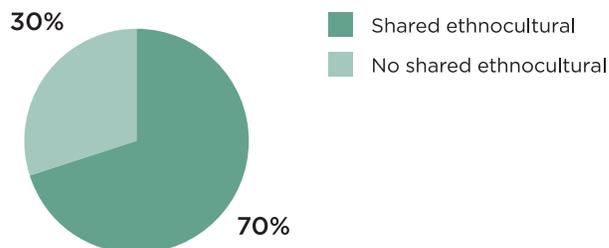
In solved cases, suspects were mostly men and were close to the age of their victims. “Solved cases” refers to cases where Ottawa Police are confident in the identity of suspects or have laid charges. Charges must be proved in court. We will continue to monitor court outcomes to update our analyses. Of 103 solved cases, 19% of cases involved multiple suspects (n = 20), ranging from 2-7 suspects for a single case. Of 137 known suspects in solved cases, 89% were men (n = 122), and 11% were women (n = 15). In 85% of solved cases, victims’ and suspects’ ages were within 10 years of each other (n = 88). Cases with multiple suspects were counted when at least one of the suspects was close in age. The largest age differences between suspects and victims were in cases of family violence where the suspect was a parent or child of their victim (88%, n = 14). A small number of cases involved a youth offender (5%, n = 5).

Figure 19. Percentage of solved cases with shared age within 10 years (n = 103)



In solved cases, most suspects shared an ethnocultural background with their victims. In 70% of solved cases, victims and suspects had a shared ethnocultural background (n = 72). Cases with multiple suspects were counted when at least one of the suspects shared an ethnocultural background with the victim.

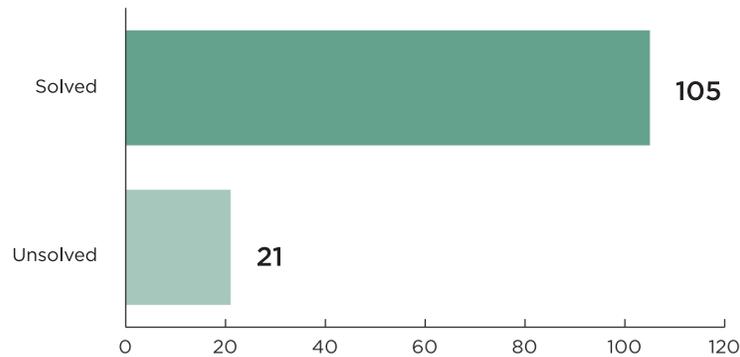
Figure 20. Percentage of solved cases with shared ethnocultural background (n = 103)



8. UNSOLVED CASES

Overall, the majority of homicide cases in our city are being solved by Police. Of the 126 homicide cases that have taken place in Ottawa from 2010-2020, 83% of cases (n = 105) have been solved by the Ottawa Police, and 17% remain unsolved (n = 21), although the police have identified suspects in some of the cases and are continuing their investigations. On April 12, 2021, the Ottawa Police announced a Task Force to review 22 unsolved cases dating back to 2009.

Figure 21. Solved and unsolved homicide cases (N = 126)



Victims in unsolved cases tend to be younger, racialized men killed with a firearm. Based on our analysis of the 21 unsolved cases from 2010-2020, the average age of homicide victims in unsolved cases was 26.7 versus an average age of 37.1 in solved cases. 95% of unsolved cases involved a male victim (n = 20), 86% of unsolved cases involved a firearm (n = 18), and 76% of unsolved cases involved a victim who was Black or Middle Eastern (n = 16). 30% of unsolved cases were concentrated in 2 postal codes (n = 6), with three cases in each. 35% of all cases involving a victim who was Black remain unsolved (n = 12), versus 5% of cases involving a victim who was Caucasian (n = 3).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Every homicide affects a family and our wider community. This report is intended to better inform prevention efforts and effective victim assistance. We offer the following recommendations:

1. MEN

Men are significantly more likely to die by homicide and to be identified as suspects. Greater effort is needed to explore and understand prevention strategies that improve conditions of safety for men, particularly young men from racialized backgrounds. We recommend that Crime Prevention Ottawa (CPO) continue to prioritize interventions to prevent street-level violence, but also consider exploring retaliatory violence and homicide prevention.

2. WOMEN

Homicide trends from 2010-2020 show progress on women's safety from partner and ex-partner homicide but highlight a continued risk of family violence. We recommend that the CPO reference group on gender-based violence develop a focus on women's experiences of family violence, particularly relating to violence from children and barriers to accessing mental health support.

3. INCLUSION

There has been a significant increase in the number of Black and Middle Eastern victims of homicide, and this demographic is also overrepresented in the number of unsolved cases. We recommend that CPO help to broker new partnerships between cultural leaders, community agencies, and victim services that specialize in trauma from violence. Specifically, the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (CRCVC) operates peer support groups for people who have lost loved ones to homicide. New partnerships could improve outreach to survivors in racialized communities to improve available support and access to trauma and violence-informed care. The Ottawa Police Victim Support Unit (VSU), Post-Incident Neighbourhood Support Networks (PINS), and Ottawa Victim Services (OVS) could help with referrals.

4. GEOGRAPHY

A large portion of homicides in Ottawa occur in a small number of postal codes. We recommend that CPO consider what role it could play to proactively examine problematic trends in neighbourhoods most affected by homicide and prioritize the implementation of evidence-based strategies tailored to their specific needs.

NEXT STEPS

Our team is continuing to work with media articles on the 2010-2020 homicides, and also tracking ongoing cases to conduct continued analyses. Currently, we are uploading relevant media articles into Atlas.ti for qualitative coding to further identify patterns and trends in cases, and how they are proceeding through the courts.

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