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## Child Abuse & Neglect

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# Epidemiology of child homicide in Jefferson County, Alabama

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### Abstract

**Objective:** The purpose of this study was to present the epidemiology of homicide among children younger than 6 years of age in Jefferson County, Alabama. This study focused on obtaining great detail on homicides and suspicious deaths occurring within a fixed population.

**Methods:** For purposes of this study, cases included Jefferson County deaths attributed to "homicide" or that were "undetermined" as noted in the coroner files among children younger than 6 years of age who were born and died between January 1, 1988 and December, 31, 1998. Victim and offender characteristics were obtained from the Jefferson County Coroner/Medical Examiner Office records. Environmental factors and circumstances surrounding the death were noted as well.

**Results:** The 53 study subjects were mainly female (55%), Black (69%), younger than 2 years of age (85%), had single mothers (38%), and a history of abuse (53%). Offenders

were more likely to be male (64%), Black (73%), and a parent of the victim (53%). Homicides primarily resulted from an angry impulse (61%), with hands the most common weapon (61%).

**Conclusions:** The majority of deaths in this study occurred among children younger than age 2, with a high proportion of fatalities among Black children of unmarried mothers. The offender most often knew the victim, with half of all homicides and two-thirds of all infant homicides involving a parent. More than half of the homicides resulted from an angry impulse, while the most common scenario for deaths with undetermined intent involved the caretaker finding the child unresponsive.

Resumen

French- and Spanish-language abstracts not available at time of publication.

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Keywords

Epidemiology; Homicide; Children; Coroner data

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