

HOMICIDE REAPS CITY'S YOUNG STUDY FINDS IT NO. 1 CAUSE OF DEATH IN BLACKS OVER 9

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Author: SUSAN WATSON AND PATRICIA ANSTETT , e Press Staff Writers

Homicides , usually involving guns, are the leading cause of death among black Detroit children over the age of nine, according to a study on childhood deaths that will be released today.

The study, conducted by Henry Ford Hospital, is believed to mark the first time any city has had **homicide** as the No. 1 killer for such **young** children, outpacing accidents, cancer, heart disease and birth defects, its author says.

Most of the deaths involved guns.

Ford Hospital's Dr. Leland Ropp, who spent six months conducting the study, said the findings on the **homicide** rate among Detroit's 10- to 14-year-olds represent a "new trend never shown before."

"I think it's safe to make the statement that Detroit sets **homicide** trends and the rest of the country follows suit, and then surpasses us," Ropp said Friday. "Right now, I don't have any evidence to show that any city around the country approaches these figures" for children in the same age group.

Previous studies have focused on older children, particularly **young** black males between 15 and 24, for whom **homicide** has long been the leading cause of death.

The Ford study, titled "Death in the City: An American Childhood Tragedy," shows a grim picture for even **younger** children.

Among boys ages 10-14, the **homicide** rate rose from 10 per 100,000 in 1980 to 28 per 100,000 in 1988. Among boys 15-18, the rate increased from 44 per 100,000 in 1980 to 145 per 100,000 in 1988.

Detroit girls were not immune. Among girls 10-14, the rate went from three per 100,000 in 1980 to 13 per 100,000 in 1988.

Among girls 15-18 in Detroit, the rate rose from five per 100,000 in 1980 to 21 per 100,000 in 1988.

Ropp said most of the victims were black. The **homicide** rates soared even higher when the study targeted 15- to 18- year-old black males in Detroit. Among that group, the **homicide** death rate peaked at 292 per 100,000 in 1987. Overall, it went from 54 per 100,000 in 1980 to 201 in 1988.

Earlier this summer, a different study found that **young** black males in Wayne County were more likely to be **homicide** victims than those in other cities in the nation. Michigan led the nation in **homicides** among black men ages 15-24. Michigan's rate was twice that of California, which has the second highest rate.

The Ford study used death certificates for both Detroit and Wayne County from 1980-88 to provide the first detailed examination of **homicide** 's toll among the very **young** .

Vernice Davis-Anthony, assistant Wayne County executive for health and community services, called the findings "a sad commentary" about increasing violence in the county -- an issue addressed by a recent task force that she cochaired.

"We've known for some time that the problem has been increasing," she said. "It points to me the need to consider violence as a public health problem and to begin to develop strategies" to curb **homicides** .

Ropp, who has worked in Ford's pediatric emergency unit for 18 months, said he treats one or two **young** gunshot victims each week. He undertook the study to see if his impressions about an upswing in violence were correct.

"You just get damned tired of seeing kids get shot, with seeing no one caring except their relatives. . . . If a black kid shoots a black kid, it doesn't make the news, except for a one-paragraph story buried on page 8.

"Blacks shooting blacks is so common that it's not news anymore," he said.

Ropp's research showed that the rate for childhood deaths from all causes increased in Detroit from 1980-1988. The rate decreased slightly in the rest of Wayne County.

The rise in **homicides** is virtually responsible for the increase in Detroit's childhood death rate, Ropp said. He will present his study at a meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics in Boston.

Nationwide, **homicides** are not the leading cause of death among the very **young** . Figures from the National Center for Health Statistics show that **homicides** ranked fourth as the cause of death among children ages 1-14. Accidents, birth defects and cancer are the leading cause of death among this age group.

Responding to the alarming death rates among children, Wayne County soon will open an office on violence reduction, said Davis-Anthony. Experts will work in several neighborhoods with a high incidence of violence to develop programs such as family intervention.

The county hopes to select the neighborhoods by Jan. 1.

The neighborhood approach is crucial to protecting **young** children, Davis-Anthony said, because too many "are caught in crossfire sitting at home, on their couch, or the porch, or in the yard, where they are subject to overall neighborhood violence."

According to a Free Press tally of Detroit Police Department records, 190 youths under 16 were victims of gunfire in Detroit as of Sept. 22. Twenty-four of them died. The peak year for gunshot fatalities was 1988, when 308 **young** people were shot and 55 died. In 1989, 289 were shot and 33 died.

The Police Department does not keep records by age.

Caption: Chart

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