

Youth Violence Prevention Project

Palm Beach County Criminal Justice Commission

An Analysis of Violent Crime in Palm Beach County and Strategies of Violence Reduction Initiatives in U.S. Cities

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We would like to thank all the staff in the local and county law enforcement agencies in Palm Beach County who were extremely cooperative in supplying data on violent arrests and spent numerous hours in their already busy schedules to compile this critical information. Also, we want to thank the Palm Beach County Medical Examiner's Office who was gracious enough to share their valuable information on cases involving murder victims who were killed with a firearm. Finally, we want to thank the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's Statistical Analysis Center for their invaluable assistance and efforts in supplying arrest history data on all offenders in Palm Beach County.

Section I: Overview of the Crime Problem in Palm Beach County

1. Introduction and Data Sources

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the crime problem in Palm Beach County with emphasis on violent crimes involving a firearm and murder offenses. In particular, Palm Beach County experienced a significant increase in the number of gun-related crimes of violence and homicide in 2004, especially amongst younger citizens. This unexpected phenomenon resulted in the need for a thorough investigation of the extent and nature of this problem, especially in relation to historical trends, the identification of who is most contributing to this serious problem, and what interventions can be implemented to alter this ominous trend adversely affecting the citizens, families, and community of Palm Beach County. Additionally, data was needed to compute projections for the future in the event that interventions are not initiated to reverse this portentous situation.

A variety of data sources was used to assess the trends in reported crime in Palm Beach County; Palm Beach County's crime problem compared to other large urban counties in Florida; and the characteristics of both offenders and victims involved in violent crimes and homicides. The purpose of presenting the data is to provide factual information regarding the extent and nature of the violent crime problem in Palm Beach County to those in a position to make recommendations, to alter existing policies, or to generate new initiatives to alleviate the problem. Unfortunately, criminal justice and crime prevention initiatives are all too often based on perceptions and opinions about the extent and nature of problems rather than empirical evidence. However, the Palm Beach County Criminal Justice Commission adopted the appropriate position that any recommended changes or enhancements to extant policies and practices dealing with

violent crime—especially those involving firearms and homicides—must be informed by sound evidence.

As previously stated, the data presented in this section was derived from a variety of sources. Without the selfless assistance of numerous agencies and individuals, a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the problem of gun related violent crime and murder in Palm Beach County would not have been possible. In particular, the sources and data elements utilized for this section include the following:

- 1) **Palm Beach County Law Enforcement Agency Data** – The Palm Beach County (PBC) Criminal Justice Commission requested crime incident data from all the local law enforcement agencies in PBC for all violent crimes in which a firearm was used from 1999 to 2005. The primary data elements include: agency; case number; date of incident; offense description; address of incident; victim(s) and suspect(s) name, date of birth, race, gender, and address; and disposition of case.
- 2) **Palm Beach County Medical Examine Data** – The PBC Criminal Justice Commission requested data from their local medical examiner relating to victims of gun-related homicides from 2000 to 2005 that were under the age of 30. The primary data elements include: agency; date and time of death; address of incident; victim’s name, date of birth, race, gender, and address; cause of death; and toxicology results.
- 3) **Florida Department of Law Enforcement Arrest Data** – This includes data from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement’s (FDLE) criminal history files on all arrests in PBC from 1990 to 2005. Additionally, all prior arrest data for this population of PBC arrestees was obtained to enable an examination of the extent and nature of prior criminal histories. The data elements include FDLE number; demographic characteristics of arrestees; arrest date; county of arrest; type of arrest charges; and statutory degree.
- 4) **Uniform Crime Reporting Data** – The data reflect crimes reported to local law enforcement agencies that are then forward to FDLE on an annual basis. The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) data for this report was downloaded from FDLE’s website: <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/fsac/>.
- 5) **Demographic Data** – The Bureau of Economic and Demographic Research (BEBR) at the University of Florida compiles county-level population data by year over the past several decades and forecasts populations over the next few

decades. The data are reported for various age, gender, and racial groups. A dataset of the population figures generated by BEBR was supplied to the researchers by the Florida Legislature, Office of Economic and Demographic Research.

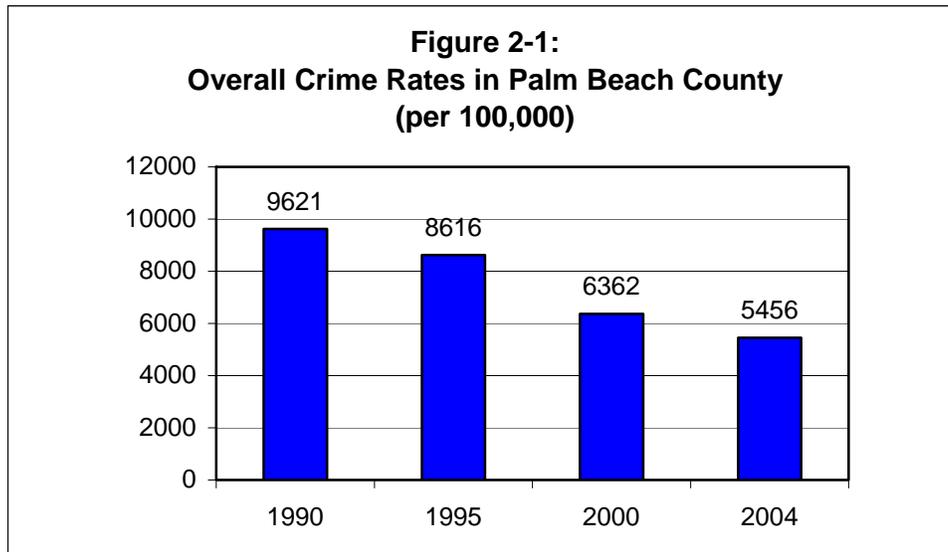
The remainder of this section is comprised of Subsections 2 through 10. In Subsection 2, multiple measures of crime rate trends in Palm Beach County are presented over a period of fifteen years. Subsection 3 compares Palm Beach County's crime rate trends with those of five similar Florida counties. In Subsection 4, data on law enforcement resources are examined for Palm Beach County and the five comparison counties. Subsections 5 and 6 investigate the characteristics of violent crime offenders and murderers, respectively. Trends in demographic changes in the resident population of Palm Beach County are presented in Subsection 7, which also provides projected resident demographic changes. This is followed by two Subsections that examine victim characteristics: Subsection 8 provides the characteristics of gun-related violent crime victims, while Subsection 9 presents data regarding the relationship between homicide offenders and their victims. Characteristics of violent crime and homicide events are investigated in Subsection 10. Finally, a summary of the data is provided in Subsection 11.

2. Crime Trends in Palm Beach County

In 2004, a barrage of media reports emerged detailing specific incidents of violent crimes with firearms generally and murders specifically that occurred in Palm Beach County. This resulted in a perception amongst many in the criminal justice community and the citizenry at large that an unprecedented epidemic of serious violent crime was occurring in communities throughout their county. Thus, this section addresses the

question of whether this current perception of a crime wave is justified through an examination of the historical trends in the levels of all violent crime, gun-related violent crime, and murder.

First, Figure 2-1 displays Palm Beach County's *overall crime* rate during the years 1990 to 2004. The crime rate figure includes the following crimes reported to the police: murder, forcible sex offenses, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft. The rates are calculated to account for changes in the resident population to enable valid comparisons in the relative level of crime in the community over time.

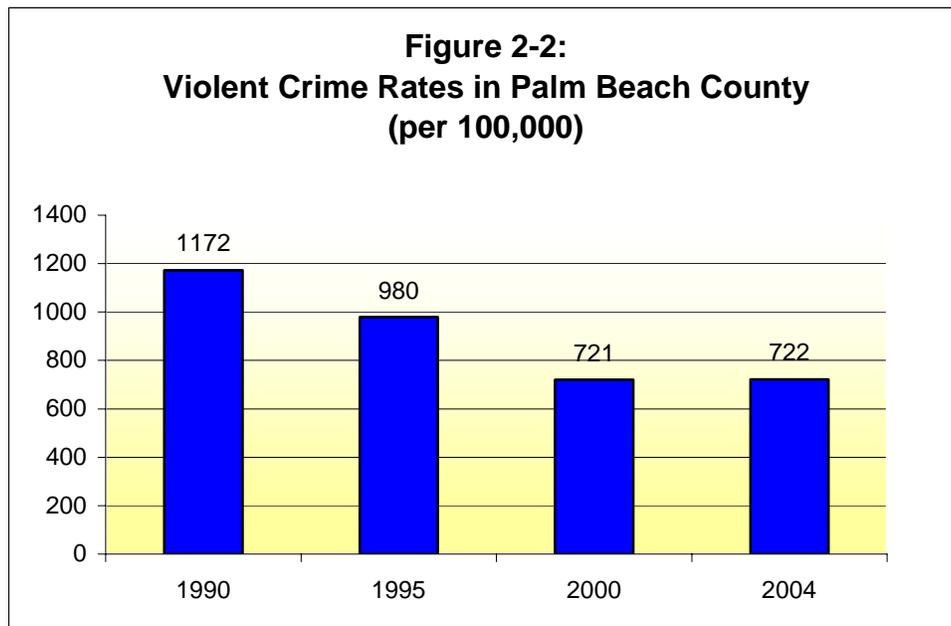


Source: FDLE: Uniform Crime Reporting System

As shown in Figure 2-1, the overall crime rate in Palm Beach County has decreased significantly during the period 1990 to 2004. Crime rates were at their highest in 1990 (9,621) and steadily decreased to their lowest level in 2004 (5,456). This is a decrease in the crime rate of 4,165, or 43.3%. This general crime measure suggests a significant positive development in terms of the level of public safety in Palm Beach County communities. However, the media accounts claim that violent crime—not

necessarily property or other crimes—have been increasing, especially those involving firearms. Thus, the following figures look at more specific crime measures; namely, violent crime, violent crime involving a firearm, homicide, and homicide involving a firearm.

Figure 2-2 shows the *violent crime* rate per 100,000 residents in Palm Beach County during the years 1990-2004. These rates are based on the crimes of murder, forcible sex offenses, robbery, and aggravated assault.

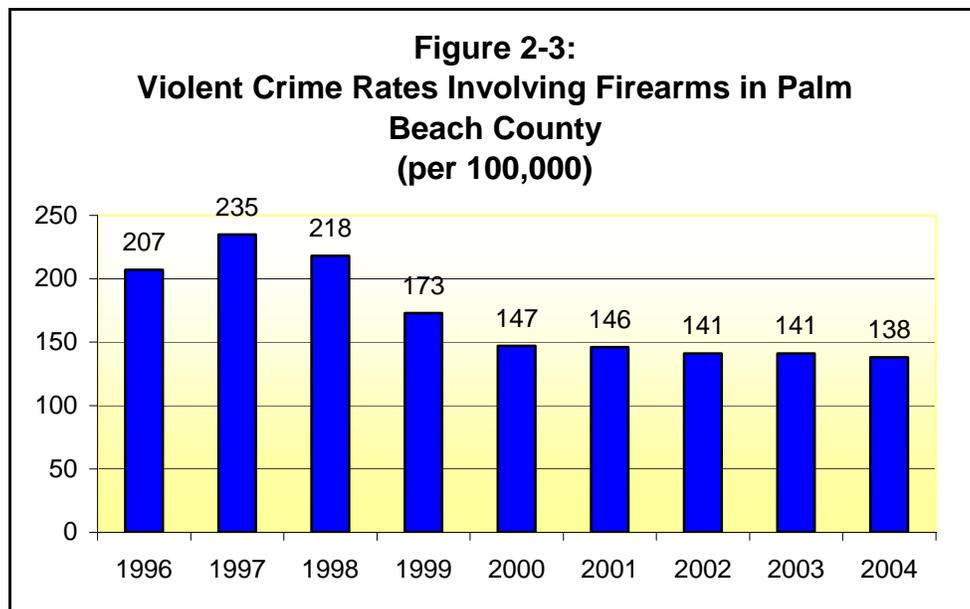


Source: FDLE: Uniform Crime Reporting System

Unlike the overall crime rate trend depicted in Figure 2-1 that has steadily decreased over this fifteen-year period, the violent crime rate declined from 1,172 in 1990 to 721 in 2000, but failed to continue the downward trend thereafter. In particular, the violent crime rate was essentially the same in 2004 (722) as it was four years earlier (721). In other words, the violent crime rate decreased from 1,172 in 1990 to 722 in

2004, representing an impressive 39.4% decrease; however, the fact that the rate has not continued on the downward trajectory over the past four years—as has the overall crime rate—is clearly cause for concern.

Further narrowing the scope of investigation, Figure 2-3 provides a description of changes in *violent crimes involving a firearm* reported to the police between 1996 and 2004. (Data prior to 1996 was not available.)

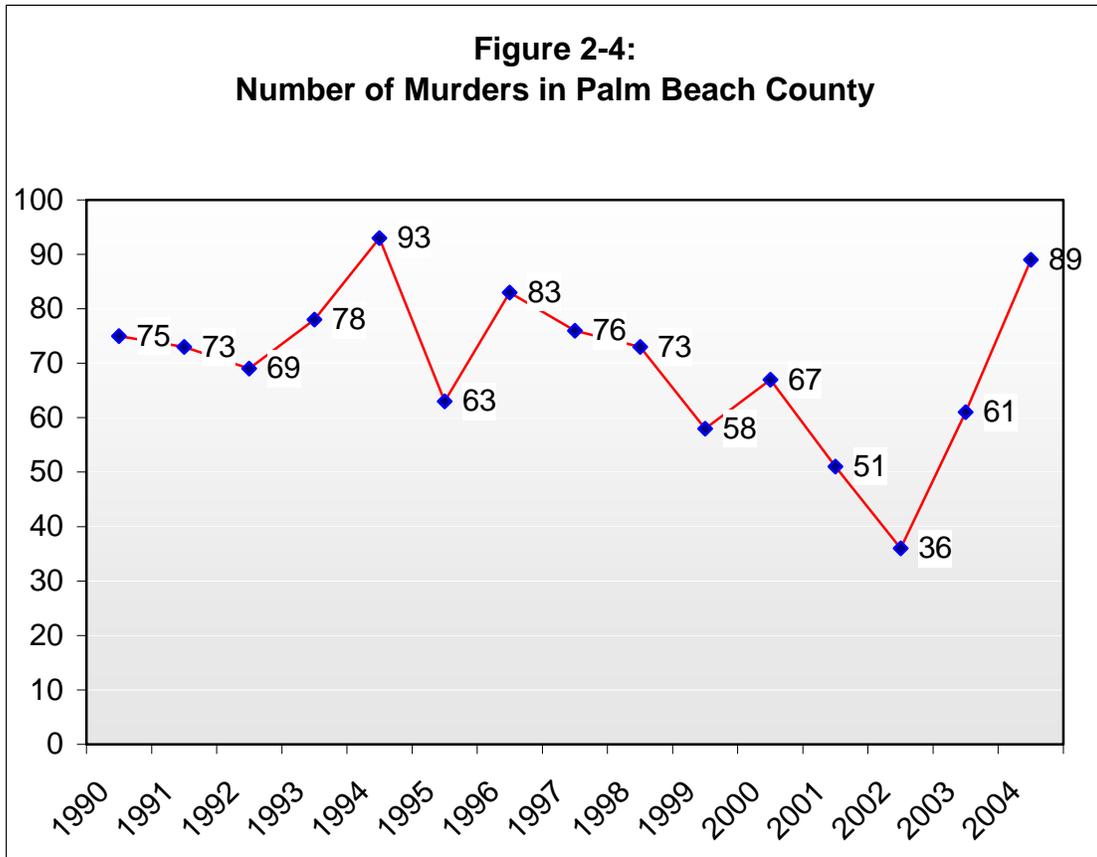


Source: FDLE: Uniform Crime Reporting System

Figure 2-3 shows that, from 1996-2004, the violent crime rate involving firearms reached its peak of 235 in 1997 and steadily declined to a level of 147 in 2000. In other words, violent crimes involving a firearm decreased by 37.4% over a relatively short period of time from 1997 to 2000, which equates to an average annual decrease of 12.5%. However, as with the violent crime rate depicted in Figure 2-2, this promising trend failed to continue through 2004. Specifically, the rate of violent crime involving a firearm only decreased from 147 in 2000 to 138 in 2004, or by 6.1% (yielding an annual average

decline of merely 1.4 %). Thus, both violent crime and gun-related violent crime have ceased to decline in recent years; however, the data do not show that these crimes are increasing either, thereby suggesting that media accounts of a violent crime epidemic may be exaggerated.

Figure 2-4 depicts trends in the number of *murders* reported to law enforcement agencies in Palm Beach County over the period from 1990 to 2004.

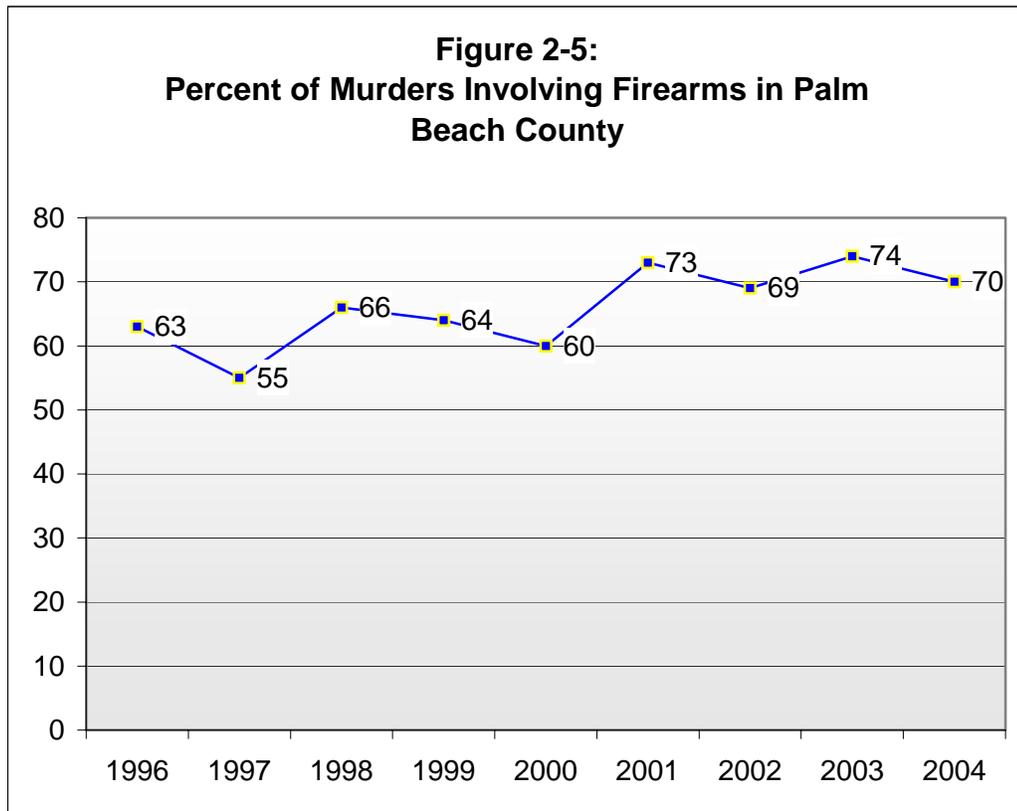


Source: FDLE: Uniform Crime Reporting System

Figure 2-4 presents a drastically different picture of crime in Palm Beach County than was depicted in earlier figures. Unlike overall crime rates, the number of murders has fluctuated from year to year, which is a typical phenomenon when examining the

number of murders over time in a relatively small geographical area. Specifically, since 1990, the number of murders reported to law enforcement agencies in Palm Beach County ranged from a low of 36 in 2002 to a high of 93 in 1994. Nevertheless, the overall trend in murders from 1990 to 2002 can be best characterized as a general downward trajectory. However, this positive trend in the murder rate changed drastically in 2003, at which point murders increased significantly to a level of 61 and continued to rise to the level of 89 in 2004. Furthermore, if the media accounts of murder incidents during 2005 are to be trusted, the 2005 murder rate will likely be consistent with or higher than those reported in 2004. The data clearly support the widespread perception that the incidence of murder in Palm Beach County has taken a significant upward turn in 2004.

To examine the validity of the perception that many of the recent incidents of murder in Palm Beach County involved firearms, Figure 2-5 focuses specifically on the percentage of murders involving firearms in Palm Beach County during the years 1996-2004.



Source: FDLE: Uniform Crime Reporting System

Over the period 1996 to 2004, the percentage of murders in Palm Beach County involving the use of a firearm has ranged from a low of 55% in 1997 to a high of 74% in 2003. Clearly, the majority of murders involve the use of a firearm, and this has been consistent over the past several years. What is particularly interesting about this trend is that the percentage of murders involving firearms ranged from 55% to 66% between 1996 and 2000, but then increased and remained at a higher level with a range from 69% to 73% during the period from 2001 to 2004. In recent years, then, Palm Beach County has experienced a substantial increase in the number of homicides involving firearms.

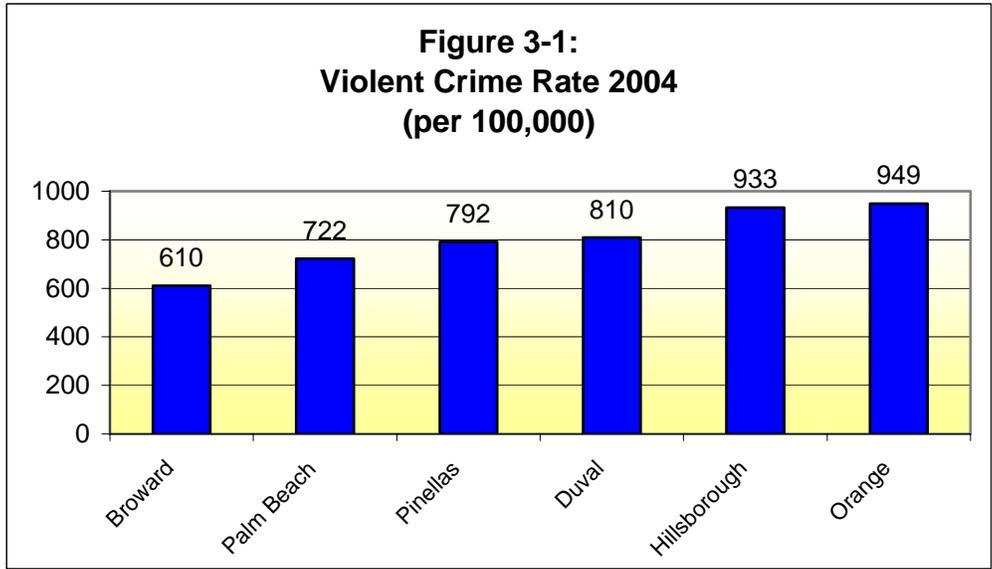
The figures presented in this section convincingly indicate that the perception of a recently increasing problem of violent crime—especially involving guns—and murders in

Palm Beach County is partially supported by the available official statistics. While the trend in *overall crime* has continued to decline in Palm Beach County as it has throughout the State of Florida, the level of *violent crime* has stabilized in the last four years after declining substantially for several years. Moreover, the proportion of homicides and homicides in which a firearm was used have taken an upsurge in recent years and remain at levels higher than was historically typical. A particularly ominous indicator is that the number of murders has taken a dramatic turn upward over the past few years and all indications suggest that this will continue in 2005, for which we do not yet have official data.

Most importantly, the data clearly point to the critical need for significant interventions to curb—and hopefully substantially reduce—the rising problem of homicide in Palm Beach County. In addition, it is also worrisome that violent crime and gun violence have ceased their trend of consistently decreasing during this same time period. However, it may prove instructive to investigate whether these trends are isolated to Palm Beach County, or whether the problem is more widespread; this issue will be examined in the following section.

3. Crime Rate Trends Across Six Urban Counties in Florida

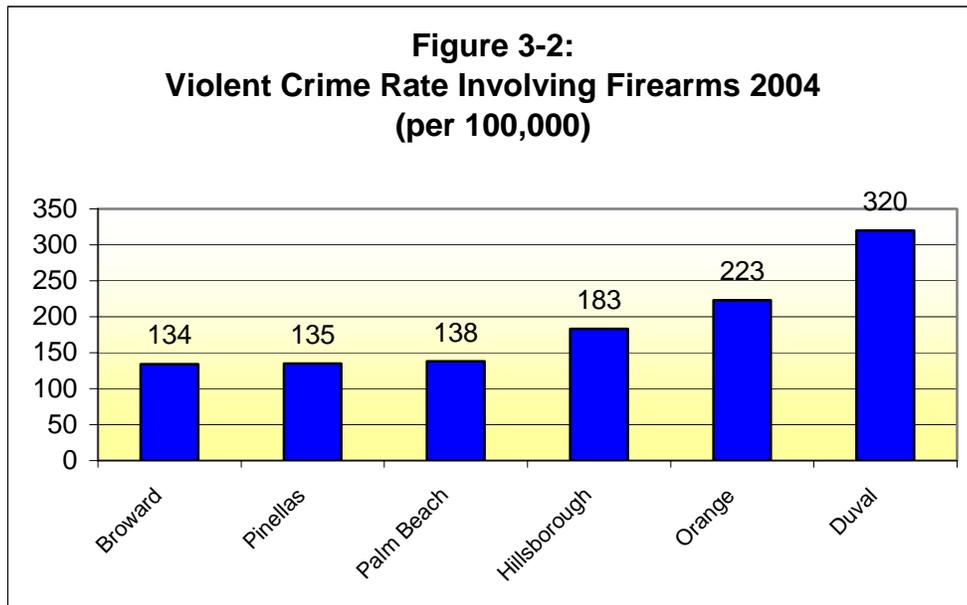
This section is designed to provide a sense of how Palm Beach County stands in relation to other large urban counties in Florida in terms of the problem of violent crime. Figure 3-1 displays a comparison of violent crime rates in six large counties in Florida during the year 2004. The counties selected for comparison are those within Florida with similarly large urban populations, including Broward County, Duval County, Hillsborough County, Orange County, and Pinellas County.



Source: FDLE: Uniform Crime Reporting System

Figure 3-1 shows that the lowest violent crime rate (610) occurred in Broward County in 2004, while Orange County experienced the most significant violent crime problem with a rate of 949 per 100,000 residents. Of these six large counties, Palm Beach County reported the second lowest rate of violent crime (722) in 2004. Therefore, in terms of overall violent crime in 2004, Palm Beach County appears to have fared quite well relative to other urban counties in Florida.

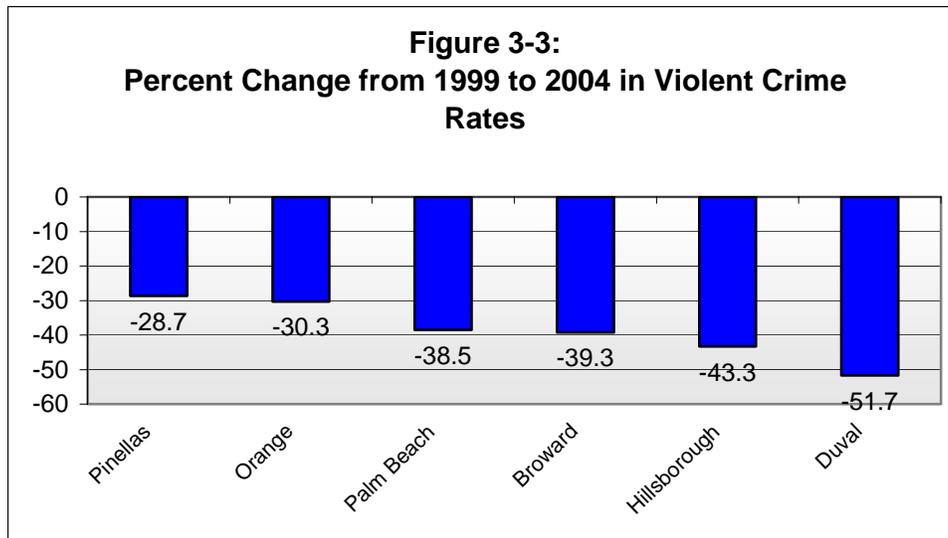
Narrowing the type of violent crimes reported to law enforcement to those involving a firearm, Figure 3-2 displays the *violent crime rates involving firearms* for the same six urban counties in Florida for the year 2004.



Source: FDLE: Uniform Crime Reporting System

Figure 3-2 shows that Broward County had the lowest violent crime rate involving firearms in 2004 (134), while Palm Beach County had a similarly low rate of violent crime with a firearm (138) and Duval County had the highest violent crime rate involving firearms (320). Nonetheless, the recent heightened concern about firearm-related violent crime in Palm Beach is still supported by the county comparative data showing that—while Palm Beach County has had a lower *overall violent crime* rate than Pinellas County—its *firearm violent crime* rate is higher.

To determine if the *trend* in violent crimes in Palm Beach County is different from other large Florida counties, Figure 3-3 provides the percent change in violent crime rates for the years 1999-2004 for the six previously discussed counties.



Source: FDLE: Uniform Crime Reporting System

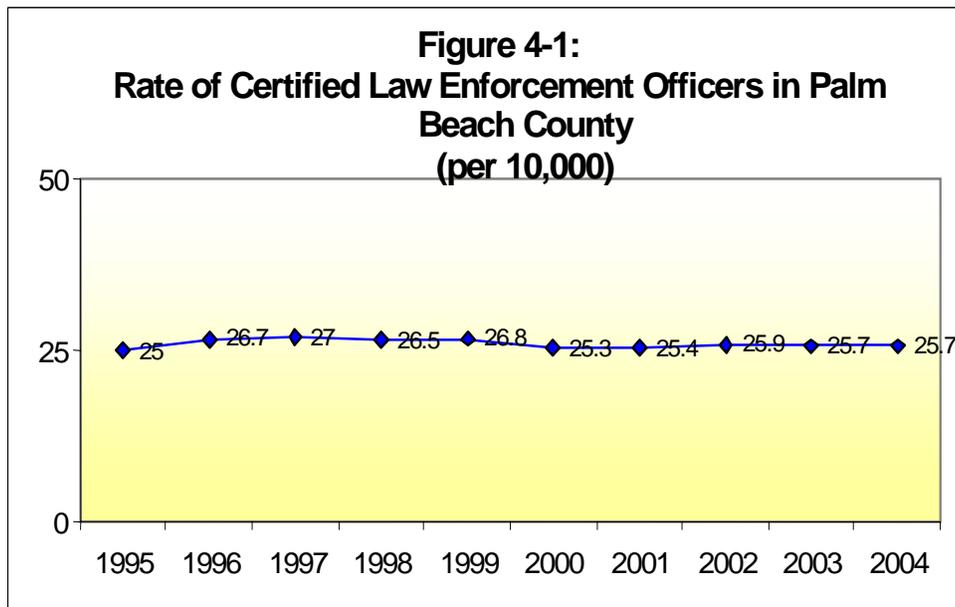
Figure 3-3 shows that all six counties experienced substantial decreases in the level of violent crime from 1999 to 2004. Pinellas County had the lowest percentage change in violent crime rates (-28.7%), while Duval County experienced the highest percent change in violent crime rates (-51.7%). Palm Beach County had the third lowest reduction in violent crime with a 38.5% decrease over this five-year period, which was essentially the same as Broward County, but reveals far less success than Hillsborough County and Duval County in realizing a reduction in violent crime.

This section demonstrates that, relative to the five comparison counties in Florida, the rate of violent crime and violent crimes involving a firearm in Palm Beach County are not alarmingly high. Moreover, two counties—Hillsborough and Duval—have reduced their level of violent crime over the past four years appreciably more so than Palm Beach

County. However, the fact that Palm Beach County had a lower overall violent crime rate than Pinellas County but a higher firearm violent crime rate still gives cause for concern. One possible explanation for these differing crime rates across time and place may be variations in law enforcement resources, which will be explored in the following section.

4. Law Enforcement Resources

Figure 4-1 addresses the question of whether the law enforcement presence in Palm Beach County has changed over the past several years, from 1995 to 2004. The figures reflect the number of certified law enforcement officers in Palm Beach County by year per 10,000 residents from 1995 to 2004.

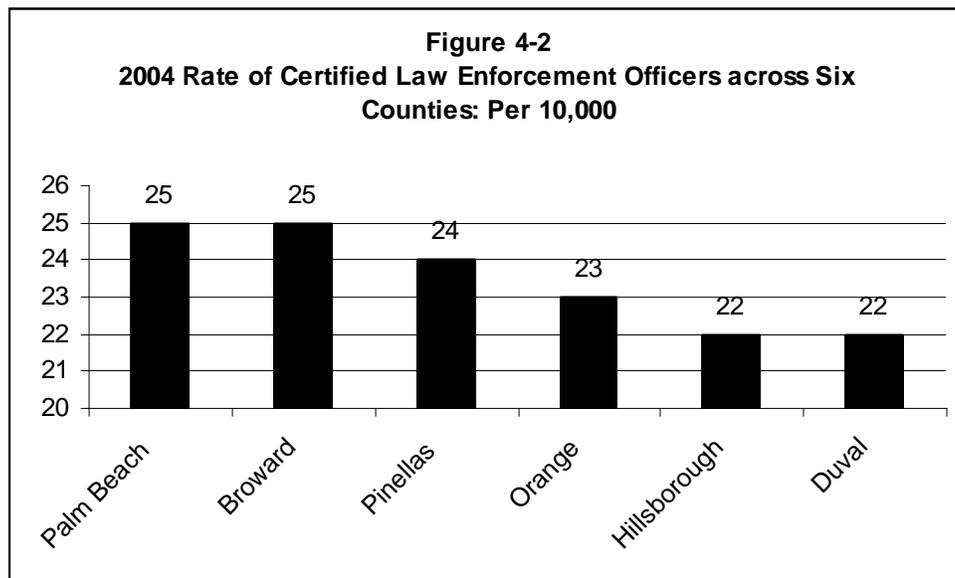


Source: FDLE: Florida Statistical Analysis Center

Clearly, the law enforcement presence in Palm Beach County has been essentially stationary over the past several years. The rate of certified officers has fluctuated minimally from a low of 25 in 1995 to a high of 27 in 1997, and has only changed from a

level of 25.3 in 2000 to 25.9 in 2004. While these differences are not significant, it is of interest that the rate of certified law enforcement officers in the more recent period of 2000 to 2004 is lower than the period from 1996 to 1999.

In order to put the numbers in Figure 4-1 into perspective, Figure 4-2 provides a comparison of the level of law enforcement presence between Palm Beach County and five other large counties in Florida in the year 2004.



Source: FDLE: Florida Statistical Analysis Center

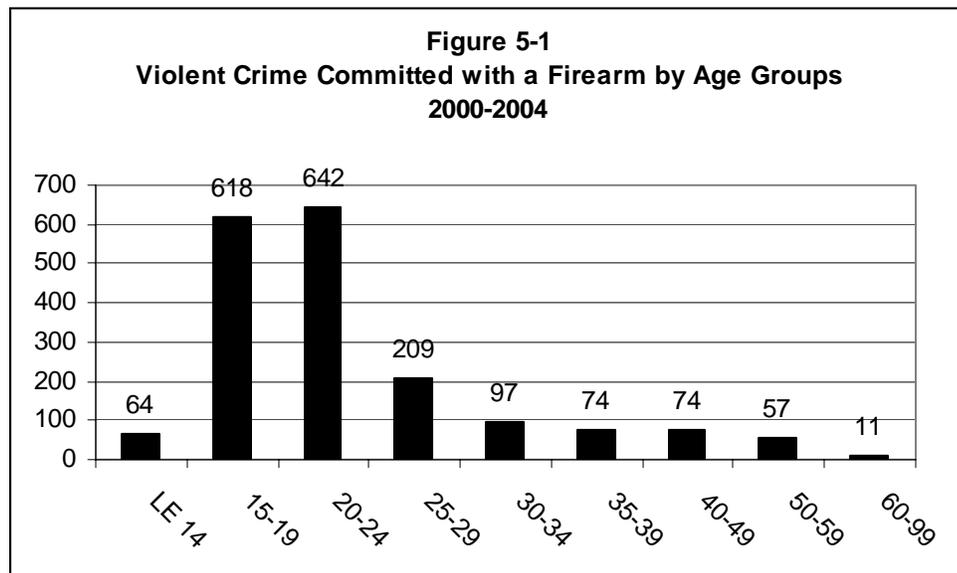
According to Figure 4-2, Palm Beach County had the highest rate of certified law enforcement officers per 10,000 residents in 2004 relative to the five other highly populated urban counties in Florida. Duval County (22.1) and Hillsborough County (22.1) had the lowest rates of certified law enforcement among the six counties in 2004, while Palm Beach County and Broward County had essentially equivalent levels of law enforcement personnel resources (25.7 and 25.5, respectively).

The data in this section show that the law enforcement presence in Palm Beach County has remained essentially constant over the past several years. Additionally,

compared to five other large urban counties, Palm Beach County has a high level of law enforcement officers relative to its resident population. While these results suggest that Palm Beach County's recent violent crime problem is not the product of relatively insufficient law enforcement resources, another possible explanation could involve the characteristics of the perpetrators of violent crime in Palm Beach County, which is the subject of the next section.

5. Violent Crime Offender Characteristics in Palm Beach County

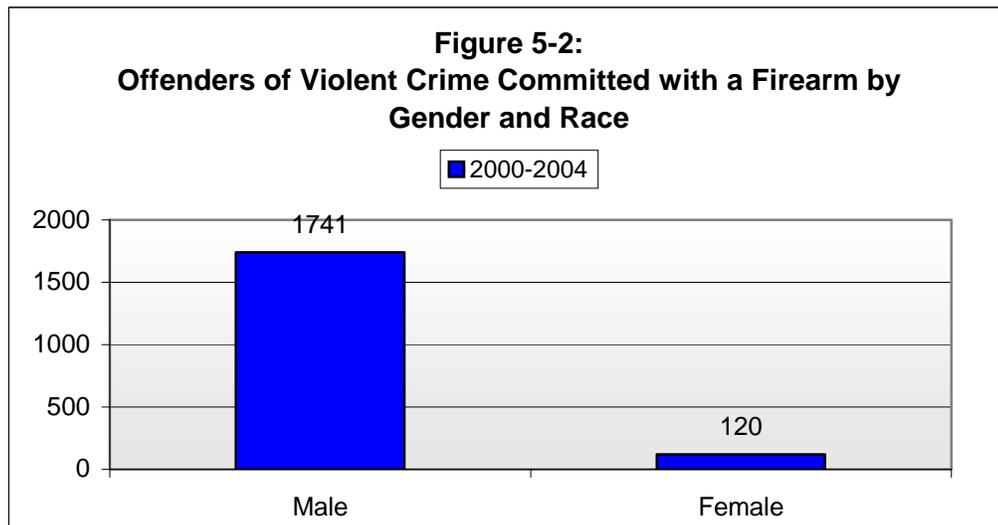
This section examines various demographic characteristics of people arrested for violent crimes in Palm Beach County. Figure 5-1 addresses the question of what age groups are most involved in firearm-related violent crime in Palm Beach County by showing the number of these crimes in which the arrestee was within various age groupings during the period from 2000 to 2004.



Source: Palm Beach County Law Enforcement Agency Arrest Data

Figure 5-1 clearly shows that two age groups account for the vast majority of violent crime committed with a firearm in Palm Beach County. Arrestees between the ages of 20 and 24 accounted for 35% (642) of offenders who committed a violent crime with a firearm from 2000 to 2004. The 15 to 19 year age group appears to be the second most violence-involved age group, accounting for 33% (618) of violent offenders using firearms. The only other age group that accounts for an appreciable number of firearm violent crimes was the 25 to 29 year old age group (209, or 11%). As Figure 5-1 makes obvious, the vast majority of violent crimes are committed by relatively young individuals between the ages of 15 and 29 (79%).

Figure 5-2 presents the difference in males versus female contribution to the problem of violent crimes committed with a firearm in Palm Beach County during the period from 2000 to 2004.

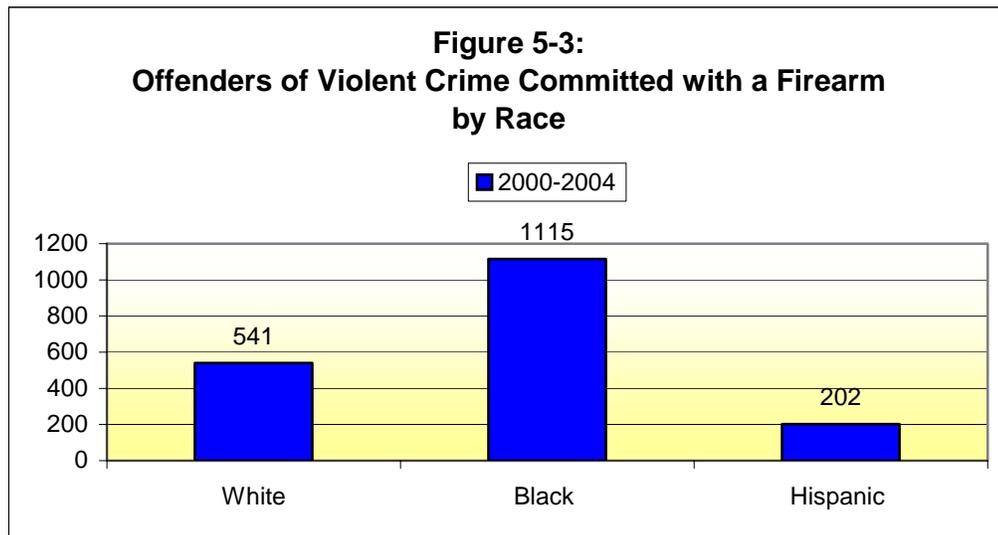


Source: Palm Beach County Law Enforcement Agency Arrest Data

Figure 5-2 demonstrates that males accounted the vast majority of violent crimes involving a firearm (1,741, 94%) from 2000-2004. Conversely, based on arrest events

involving violent crimes with a firearm, females were arrested in only 120—or 6%—of these incidents.

To examine race differences, Figure 5-3 presents differences in the involvement of different racial groups in the problem of violent crimes committed with a firearm in Palm Beach County during the period from 2000 to 2004.



Source: Palm Beach County Law Enforcement Agency Arrest Data

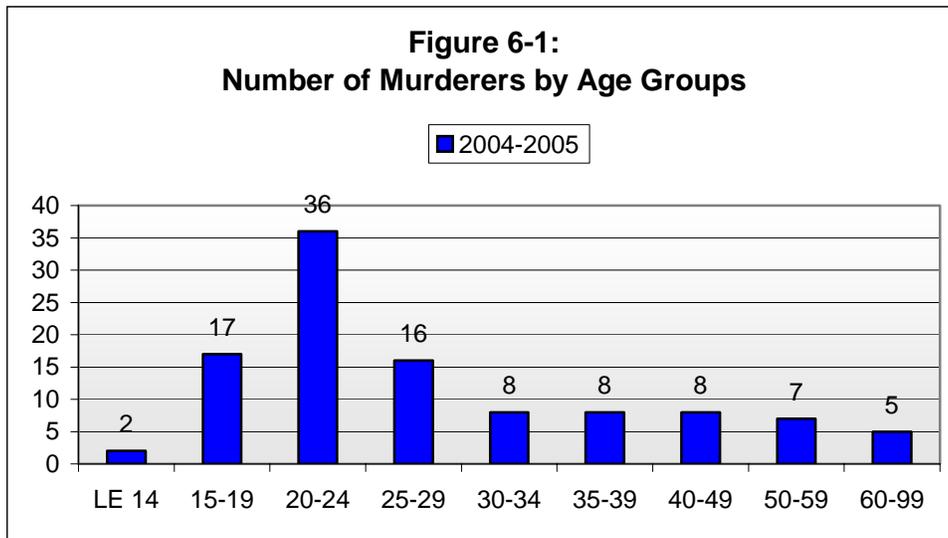
Figure 5-3 shows that blacks accounted for the majority of violent offenders using firearms (1,115, or 60%), while whites accounted for 29% (541) and Hispanics were arrested for 11% (202) of violent crimes committed with a firearm during the period 2000-2004.

To summarize, this section demonstrates that the perceptions held by the criminal justice community regarding the problem of gun violence in Palm Beach County can primarily be attributed to younger individuals. Specifically, those in the age group 20 to 24 years contribute the most to this problem, followed by those 15 to 19 years of age and then those 25 to 29 years of age. Additionally, males commit more than nine of every ten

violent crimes with a gun, while blacks disproportionately contribute to this problem relative to whites and Hispanics. The data indicate that efforts to curb gun violence need to be focused on younger, male, and—to a lesser extent—black residents. While this section answers the question of who is responsible for the majority of firearm-related violent crime in Palm Beach County, the following section examines the demographic and criminal involvement characteristics of people arrested for murder.

6. Murder Offender Characteristics in Palm Beach County

Figure 6-1 begins the process of providing a comprehensive description of the individuals involved in murder in Palm Beach County. This table displays a breakdown of the age groups of offenders arrested for murder in Beach County during 2004-2005. (Note that the number for 2005 is only for the first quarter of that year.)

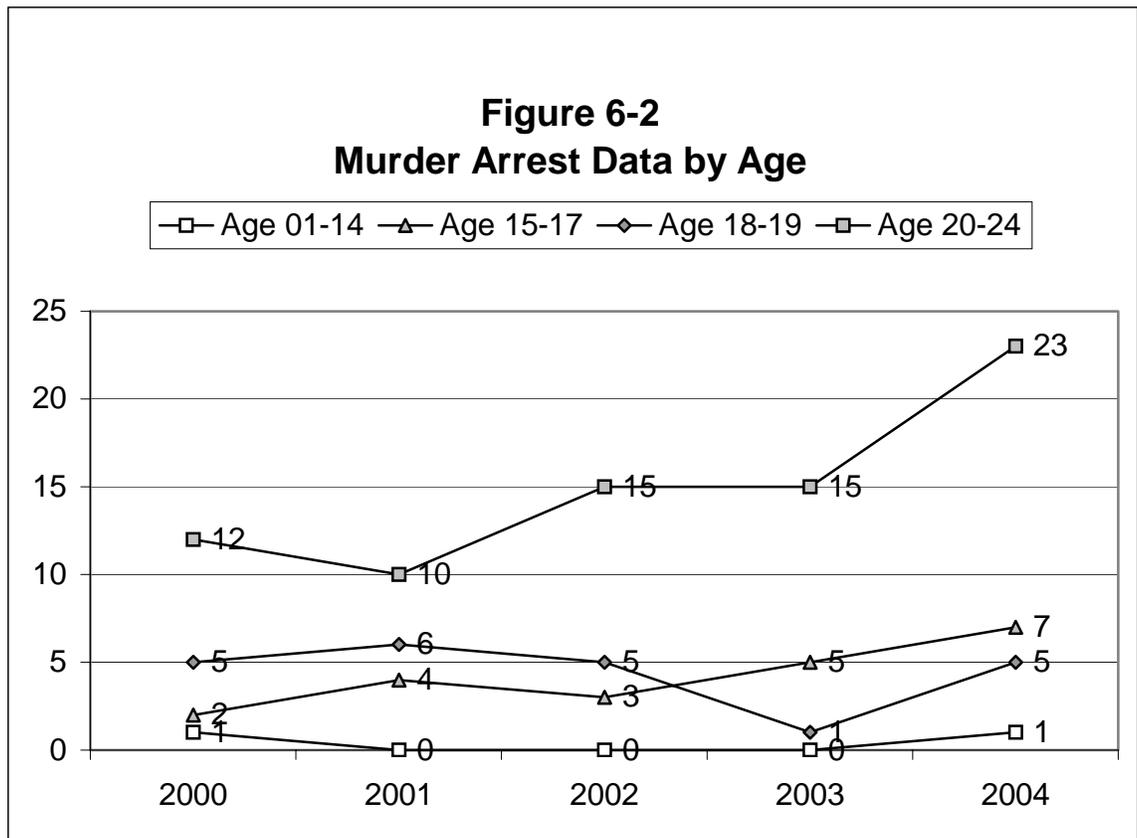


Source: FDLE: Computerized Criminal History Data

As was the case with firearm-related violent crime, the age group most likely to commit murder in Palm Beach County during this recent period is young adults, particularly those between the ages of 20 and 24 (36). The next highest group was those

15 to 19 years of age (17), followed by those 25 to 29 years of age (16). In fact, these three age groups committed more than twice as many murders during this period than all the other age groups combined (89 versus 40). These figures indicate that murderers in Palm Beach County are most likely to be younger adults.

To determine if there have been changes in the frequency of murders within certain age groups over time, Figure 6-2 displays the number of murder arrestees by age groups for the period from 2000 to 2004.



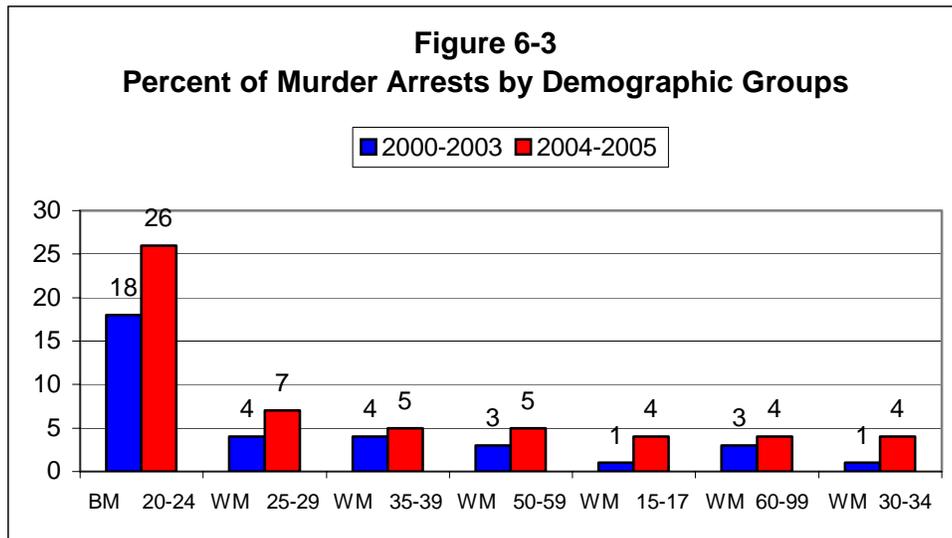
Source: FDLE: Computerized Criminal History Data

Figure 6-2 demonstrates that murder arrests remained relatively consistent within all the age groups until 2003; however, all age groups exhibited an increase in murder arrests from 2003 to 2004. From 2000-2004, murder arrests were highest among the 20

to 24 age group and—most significantly—the number of murder arrests for this age group increased significantly more than for any other group from 2003 to 2004 (15 to 23).

These trends within age groups clearly indicate that young adults between the ages of the 20 and 24 are a significant factor in the recent surge in the number of murders occurring in Palm Beach County.

Figure 6.3 shows the number of murder arrests by specific race, gender, and age groups during two different periods, 2000-2003 and 2004-2005. These demographic groups are not inclusive of all possible combinations because space does not allow us to show all the data; thus, the groups selected include those with the highest numbers of murder arrests in 2004-2005.

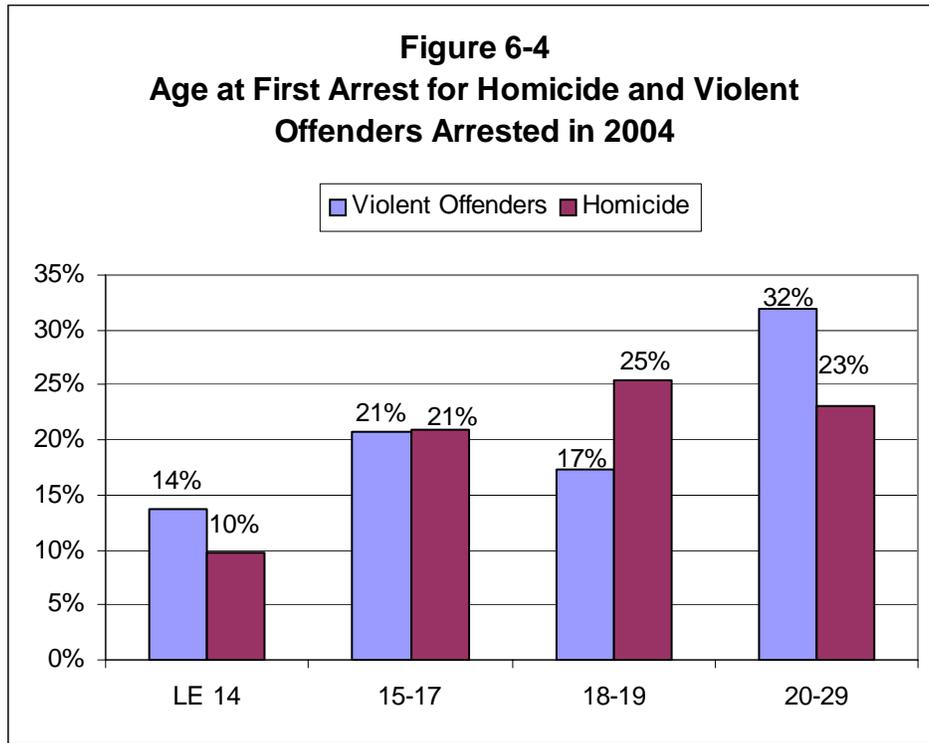


Source: FDLE: Computerized Criminal History Data

In comparison to other demographic groups, black males were more than four times more likely to be arrested on murder charges during the years 2000-2003 than the next highest demographic group, white males ages 25-29. This disparity remained fairly constant for murder arrestees during the years 2004-2005. The data indicate that young

adult black males have contributed disproportionately to the recent increase in murders in Palm Beach County.

To provide a sense of how early in life violent offenders and murderers begin their criminal careers, Figure 6.4 shows the age at first arrest for both homicide and violent offenders arrested during 2004.

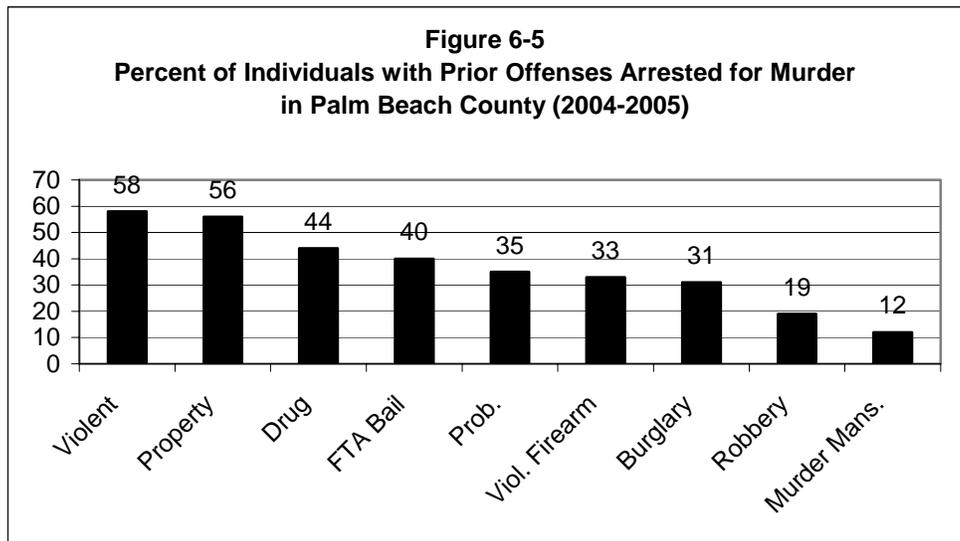


Source: FDLE: Computerized Criminal History Data

Of those arrested for violent offenses in 2004, 32% were arrested for their first offense between the ages of 20-29, while 35% were under the age of 18 when they began their criminal careers (14% were 14 or younger and 21% were 15 to 17 years of age). Of those arrested for homicide, 25% were arrested for their first offense between the ages of 18-19 and 31% were under the age of 18 when they began their criminal careers (10% were 14 or younger and 21% were 15 to 17 years of age). This table shows that 84% of

violent offenders have an arrest record before the age of 30, compared to 79% of homicide offenders.

Figure 6-5 provides a description of the types of crimes murder arrestees in Palm Beach County have been arrested for in their past. The table reflects these figures for murder suspects arrested during the years 2004-2005.



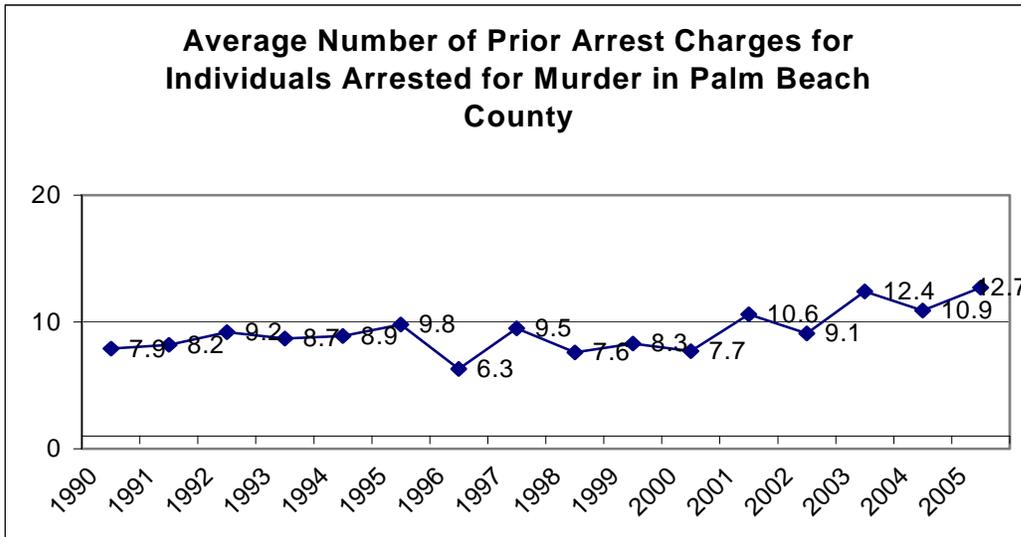
Source: FDLE: Computerized Criminal History Data

The data show that 58% of the individuals arrested in 2004-2005 for murder in Palm Beach County had prior violent offenses, 56% had a prior property arrest, and 44% had previously been arrested for drugs offenses. Further, a high percentage of these murder arrestees had failed to abide by orders of the court or conditions of a probation sentence. Specifically, 40% had failed to appear before the court while out on bail and 35% had violated the terms of a court imposed probation sentence. Additionally, about one in three murder arrestees had previously been arrested for a firearm crime or a

burglary in their past, 19% had been arrested for robbery, and 12% for a murder or manslaughter crime.

In order to determine if murder suspects arrested are changing in terms of the severity of their prior criminal records over time, Figure 6-6 provides the average number of prior arrest charges for individuals arrested for murder in Palm Beach County for each of the years from 1990 to 2005.

Figure 6-6

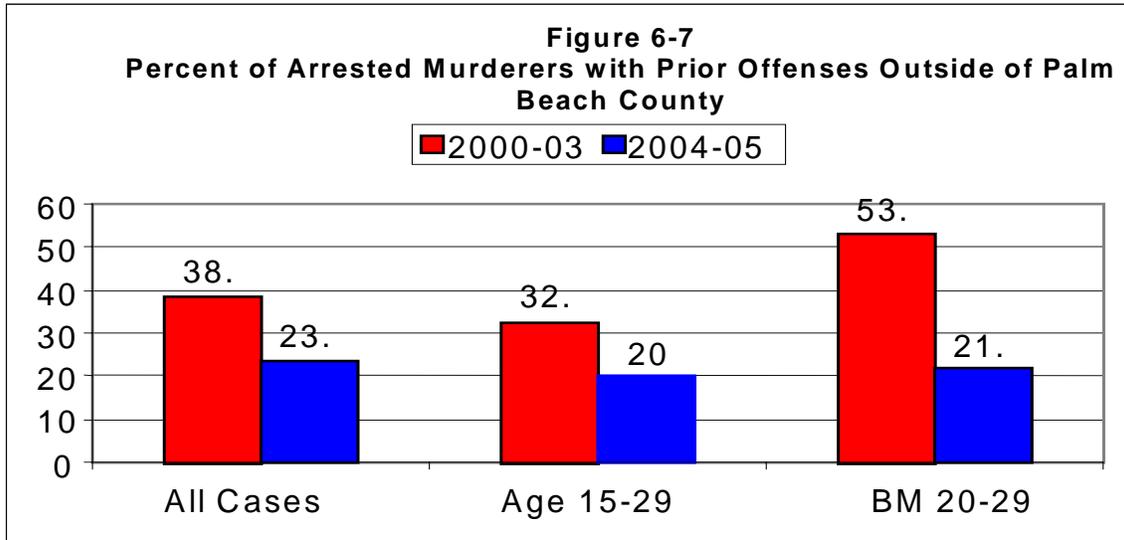


Source: FDLE: Computerized Criminal History Data

Murder arrestees over this 15-year period had an average of 6.3 to 12.7 arrest charges prior to their murder arrest. The average number of prior arrests was fairly constant from 1990 to 2000. However, an increase in prior arrests occurred in 2001 (10.6) and the average reached an all time peak in 2005 (12.7). The data indicate that over more recent years, the seriousness of criminal involvement for people arrested for murder in Palm Beach County has increased to a significantly higher level than in the past.

Figure 6-7 provides a depiction of how many arrested murderers in Palm Beach County for the years 2000-2003 to 2004-2005 are inter-county offenders by showing the

percent of these offenders who have been arrested outside of Palm Beach County at some point in the criminal careers.



Source: FDLE: Computerized Criminal History Data

For all murder arrestees, a relatively high percentage of these offenders are inter-county offenders. In fact, 38.9% of all the murder arrestees from 2000 to 2003 had been arrested outside of Palm Beach County, and 23.5% were inter-county offenders who were arrested for murder in 2004 and 2005. In the 15-29 age group, the percent of arrested murderers with prior offenses committed outside of Palm Beach County was somewhat lower (32% in 2000-2003 and 20% in 2004-05). Although not shown in the above Figure, the percentage of black males arrested for murder who were inter-county offenders was quite high in the period from 2000 to 2003 (53.3%), but decreased substantially in 2004 and 2005 (21.7%).

This section examined the characteristics of suspects arrested for murder in Palm Beach County and found that—similar to the data on violent gun crimes—the age group of 20 to 24 years is contributing the most to the homicide problem, followed by those 15 to 19 years of age and then those 25 to 29. In addition, the murder problem is growing

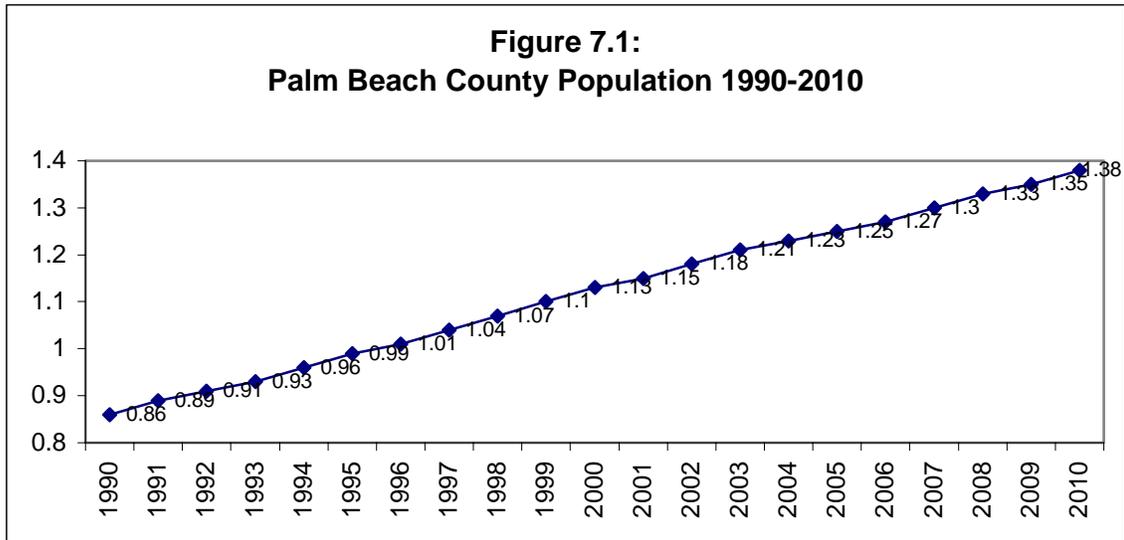
fastest amongst those who are 20 to 24 years of age. More specifically, black males between the ages of 20 and 24 are the most murder prevalent race/gender/age group and their rate of murders has increased significantly over the past few years.

These data also revealed that a high percentage of murder suspects have committed violent crimes in their past, and that more than one in three had failed to abide by the court in terms failures to appear in court or violating the terms of a probation sentence. Additionally, the seriousness of the prior arrest records of murder suspects has increased over the past several years based on the average number of arrests, and a considerable portion of these arrestees have not restricted their criminal activities to Palm Beach County.

These findings indicate that strategies to address the growing problem of murder in Palm Beach County should take into consideration the fact that it is concentrated within specific race/gender/age groups. Also, the fact that the vast majority of the murder suspects have prior criminal records—as well as the fact that the breadth of their prior offenses is increasing and many have been before the courts in the past with negative results—indicates that enhanced early interventions could prevent many offenders from escalating in their offending to where they contribute to the murder problem in Palm Beach County.

7. Changes in the Resident Population in Palm Beach County

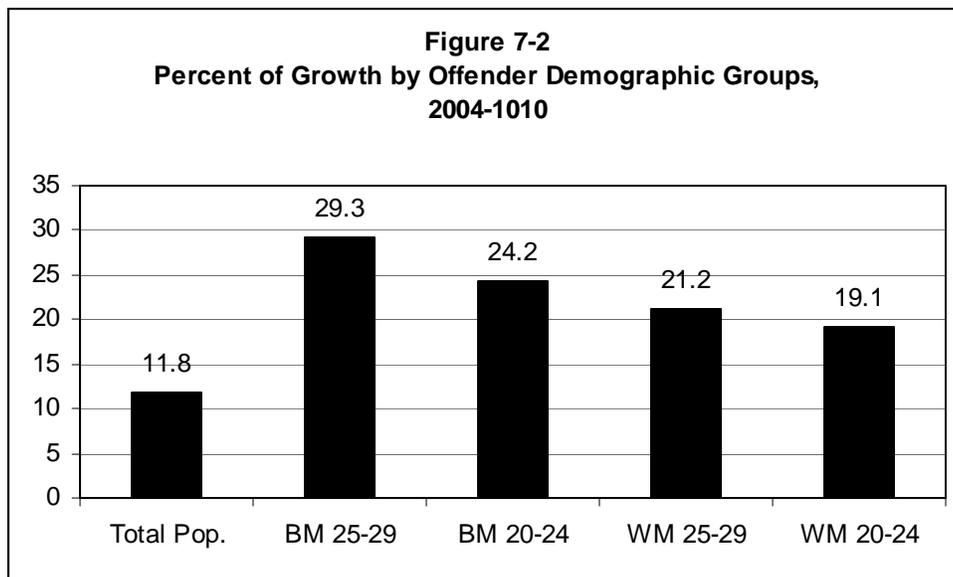
Turning to the overall demographic trends in Palm Beach County, Figure 7-1 presents the growth in the total resident population from 1990 to 2010, in millions.



Source: University of Florida: Bureau of Economic and Demographic Research

Clearly, the Palm Beach County population has experienced significant and consistent increases in its resident population since 1990. The population grew from .86 million in 1990 to 1.21 million in 2005—an increase of .35 million people. Current projections, moreover, forecast that the number of residents will continue to increase and reach a level 1.38 million people over the next five years in 2010.

Figure 7-2 depicts how the various race, gender, and age groups shown to be the major contributors to the problem of firearm-related violent crimes and murder are projected to change from 2004 to 2010.



Source: University of Florida: Bureau of Economic and Demographic Research

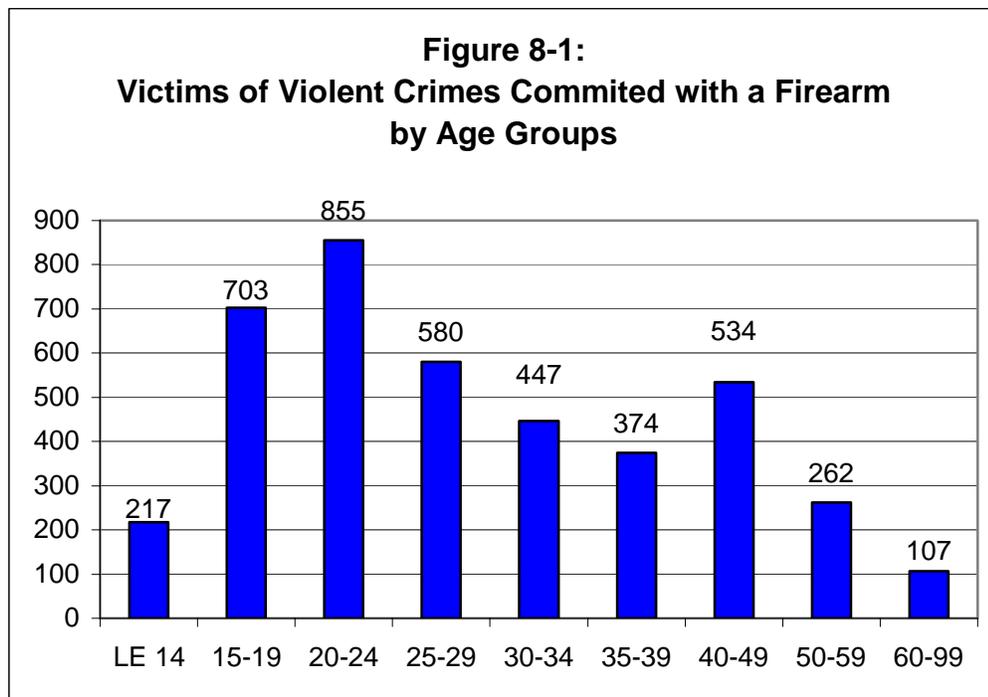
Figure 7-2 illustrates that the total population of Palm Beach County is projected to increase by 11.8% between 2004 and 2010. Black males 25 to 29 years of age are projected to experience the highest growth in the resident population (29.3%), followed by black males aged 20-24 (24.2%)—which is the very group most likely to be arrested for murder—and then white males ages 25 to 29 (21.2%), and white males of 20 to 24 years of age (19.1%). These projected trends in the demographic makeup of Palm Beach County through the year 2010 suggest that—unless steps are taken to counteract the problem of gun violence and murder among specific demographic groups—the rates of these serious crimes will continue to increase over the next five years.

The data thus far show that certain demographic groups are the primary source of the gun violence and murder problem in Palm Beach County. This section in particular shows that Palm Beach County will experience consistent growth in its total resident population; more importantly, the demographic groups that are contributing most to these crime problems are expected to grow at a much faster rate over the next five years than

other demographic groups. Specifically, the race/gender/age groups most likely to commit gun violence and murder are expected to increase at rates two to three times greater than the general population. Clearly, if well-designed interventions to address the high prevalence of gun violence and murder amongst these key demographic groups are not implemented, the problem will very likely accelerate in future years.

8. Characteristics of Victims of Violent Crimes with a Firearm

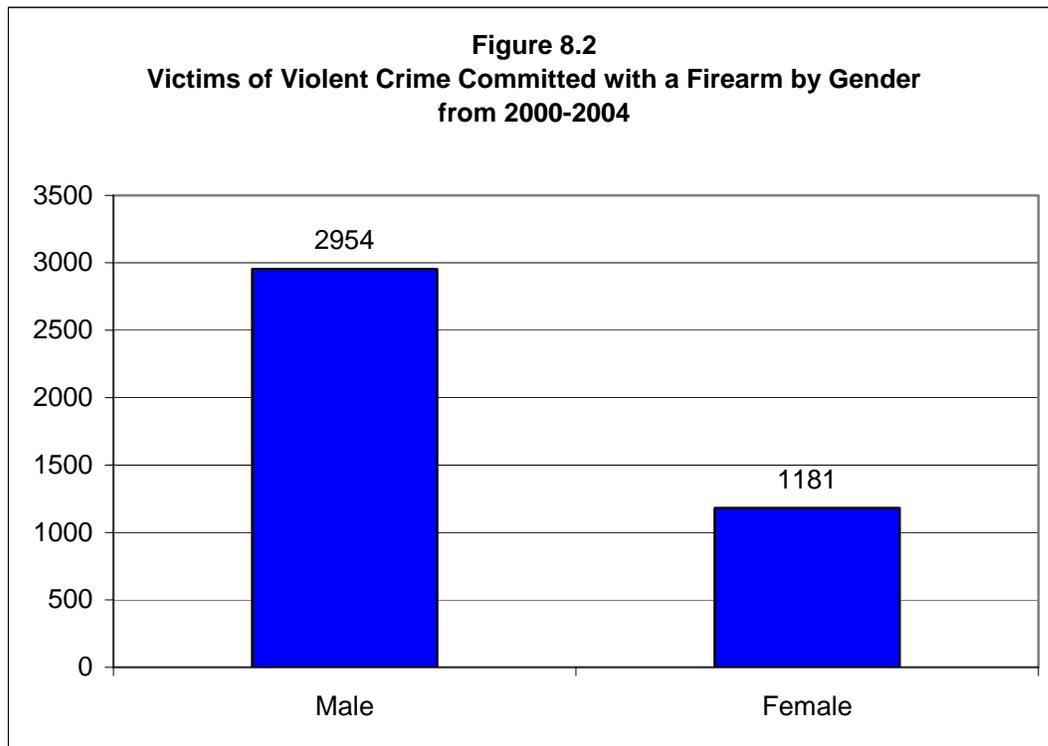
Another relevant issue heretofore neglected is that of the victims of firearm-related violent crimes. Thus, Figure 8-1 turns to the characteristics of the victims of violent crimes committed with a firearm. Specifically, these data in this figure show the age groups most vulnerable to fall victim to a violent crime during the period from 2000 to 2004.



Source: FDLE: Computerized Criminal History Data

Figure 8-1 demonstrates that the ages of citizens most likely to be the victim of a violent crime in Palm Beach County are those 20 to 24 years of age (613). The next most vulnerable age group includes those who are 15 to 19 years of age (703), followed by the 25 to 29 age group (580). Following the national trend, the elderly population in Palm Beach County are the least likely to fall victim to a violent crime (77). The data—when compared to the age groups most likely to be arrested for violent crimes involving a firearm—indicate that the offenders and victims most likely to be involved in these serious crimes are members of the same age groups; namely, the majority of both offenders and victims are between the ages of 15 and 29.

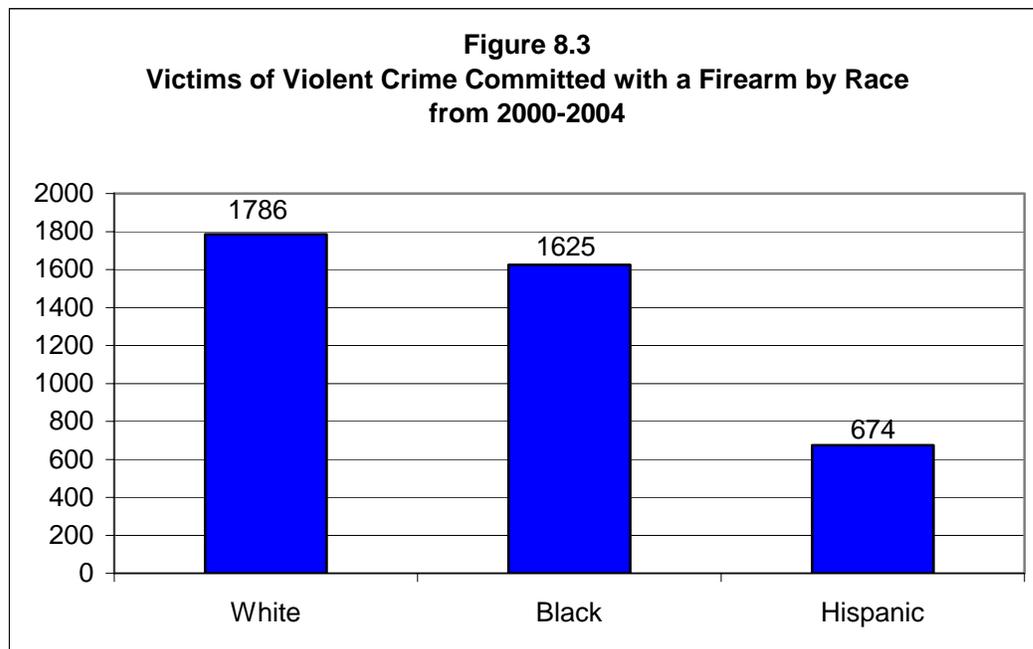
Figure 8-2 displays the gender of victims of violent crime committed with a firearm in Palm Beach County during the period from 2000 to 2004.



Source: FDLE: Computerized Criminal History Data

Males accounted for 72% (2,954) of the victims of violent crime involving the use of a firearm in comparison to the 28% (1,181) of female victims. Again, then, offenders and victims involved in gun-related violent crime tend to be in the same gender group, male.

To examine whether this pattern holds true for race as well, Figure 8-3 displays the race of victims of violent crime committed with a firearm in Palm Beach County during the period from 2000 to 2004.



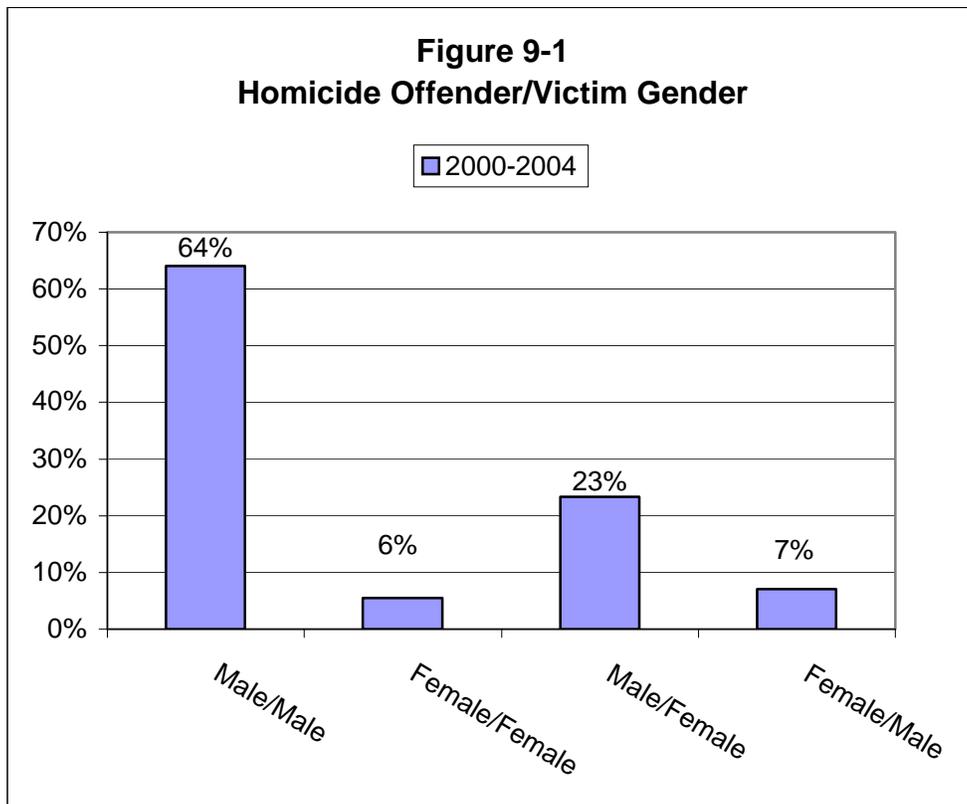
Source: FDLE: Computerized Criminal History Data

Figure 8-3, however, shows that there is less of a race effect between offenders and victims than there was an age and gender effect. Specifically, whites and blacks are basically equally likely to be a victim of a violent crime with a firearm, with whites accounted for a slightly greater portion of the victims (44%, or 1,786) than blacks (40%, or 1,625). Compared to whites and blacks, Hispanics are much less likely to be a victim of a violent crime involving a firearm at 16% (674).

This section revealed that the victims of gun-related violent crime bear striking resemblances to their victimizers. Specifically, victims tend to be in either the 20 to 24 or 15 to 19 age group, as are the perpetrators of violent crimes involving firearms. In addition, the vast majority of both victims and offenders are males. However, while gun-related violent crime offenders are generally black, slightly more of their victims are white than black. In sum, the victims and offenders of these offenses tend occupy the same demographic groups.

9. Relationships of the Offenders and Victims of Homicide

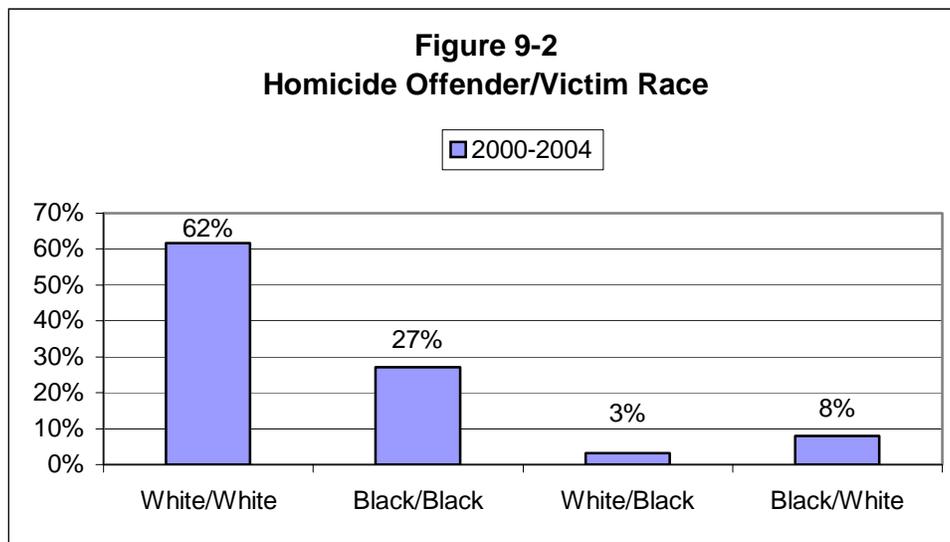
While the preceding section examined the demographic characteristics of firearm-related violence crime victims, this section investigates the relationships between these victims and their offenders. First, Figure 9-1 shows the proportion of cases when the offender and victim were the same or different genders in homicide incidents for the period 2000 to 2004.



Source: FDLE: Supplemental Homicide Reporting System

Clearly, and unsurprisingly given the data presented in the previous section, most homicides included a male offender and male victim (64%). About one in four (23%) murders involved a male offender and a female victim, while 7% were female-on-male murders, and about 6% involved both female offenders and victims.

Figure 9-2 shows the percentages of homicides during the period from 2000 to 2004 in terms of whether they were intra-racial or inter-racial offenders and victims. It is important to point out that of the homicides in the FDLE Supplemental Homicide Reporting System from 2000 to 2004, 40.4% had missing data on one or both of the variables of the race of the offender and race of the victim. By necessity, the figures reported in Figure 9-2 are based only on those cases where the race of both the offender and victim were reported. Therefore, these should only be used to represent the relative rates of homicides that are inter versus intra racial and not for the proportion of homicides in which the offender or victim were white or black

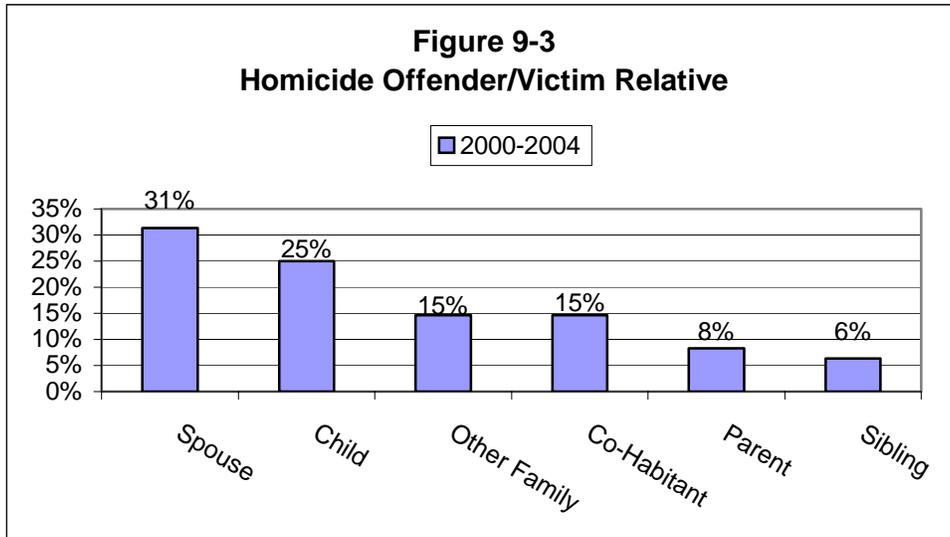


Source: FDLE: Supplemental Homicide Reporting System

During 2000-2004, most homicides were intra-racial (89%). Inter-racial homicide only accounted for 11% of all homicides. Most homicides (62%) in 2000-2004 involved a white offender against a white victim.

Figure 9-3 shows the relationship between the offender and victim in incidents of gun-related homicide for the period 2000 to 2004. However, these figures only include

cases where the relationship between the offender and victim were known, and are presented as percentages of the total number cases.



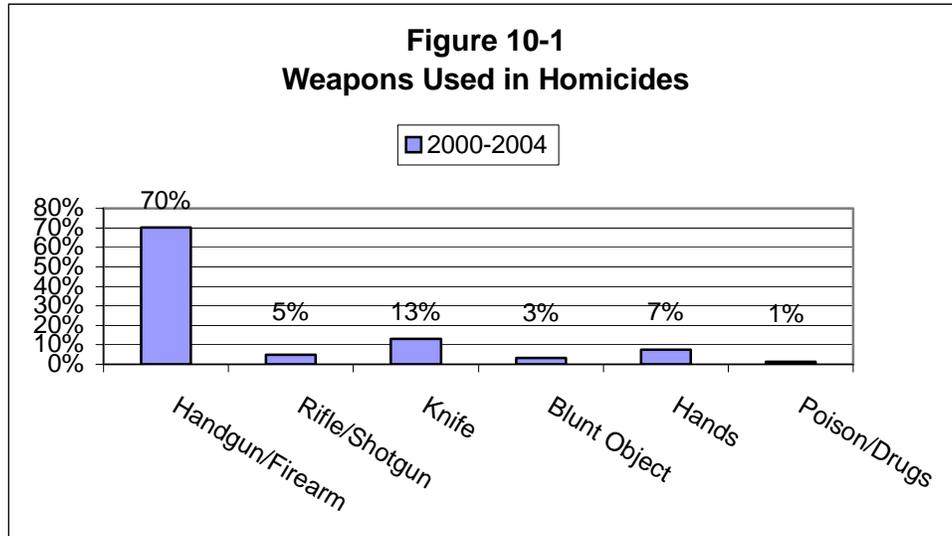
Source: FDLE: Supplemental Homicide Reporting System

The most prevalent relationship between the homicide offender and victim was spousal (31%). The next highest category involved a parent and child relationship (25%). Other family and cohabitants were the next most frequent offender/victim relationships (15%), followed by parent (8%) and sibling (6%).

This section revealed that the majority of homicides in Palm Beach County are same-sex crimes; however, approximately one in four homicides involve male offenders and female victims. Additionally, nearly 90% of homicides are intra-racial, and almost 50% cases in which the relationship was known involved spouse or co-habitant perpetrators. The data indicate that intervention strategies should consider the fact that most homicides are between offenders and victims who know each other, and are of the same gender, age, and race.

10. Characteristics of Homicides and Violent Crimes

A final issue of substantial interest is that of offense characteristics; namely, the use of weapons and the timing of homicides in Palm Beach County. To this end, Figure 10-1 shows the type of weapons used in homicides during 2000-2004.

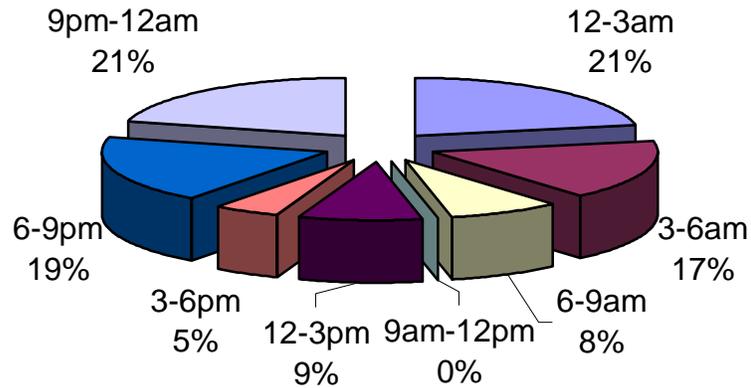


Source: FDLE: Supplemental Homicide Reporting System

Figure 10-2 illustrates that the overwhelming majority of homicides were committed with firearms. Handguns were used in the commission of 70% of all homicides. With the addition of the rifle and shotgun category, 75% of all homicides during 2000-2004 were committed with some type of firearm. Knives were the next most common lethal weapon (13%), followed by hands (7%), blunt objects (3%), and poison or drugs (1%).

Next, Figure 10-2 shows the 2000-2004 percentages of *homicides* involving a firearm by time of day.

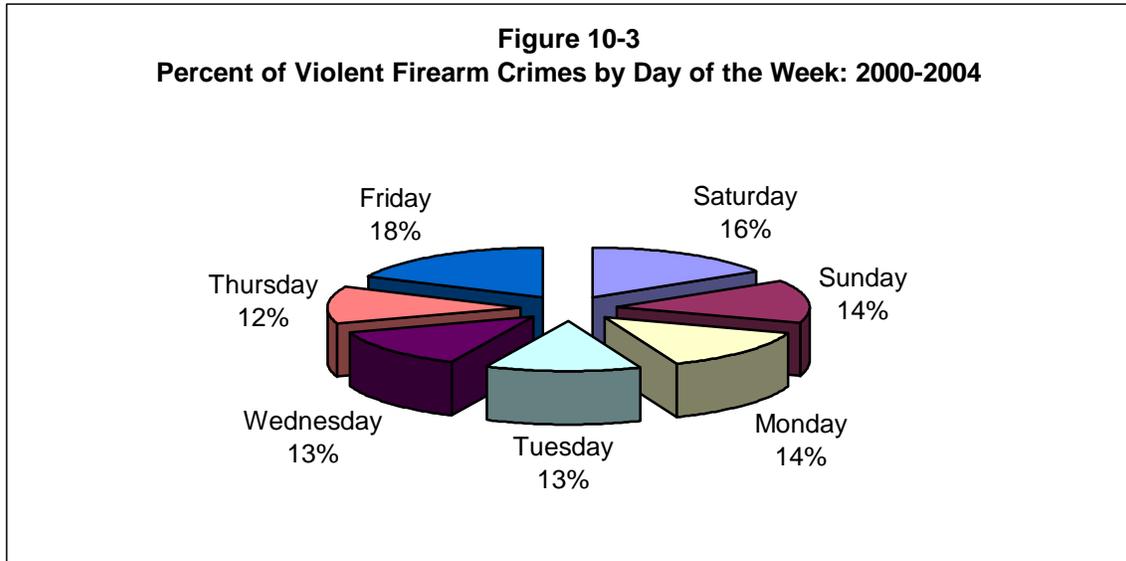
Figure 10-2
Percent of Homicides Involving a
Firearm by Time of Day: 2000-2004



Source: Palm Beach County Medical Examiner Records

Figure 10-2 reveals that most homicides involving a firearm were committed during the night hours of 9pm to 12am (21%) and 12am to 3am (21%), together accounting for almost half of all firearm homicides (42%). Homicides involving a firearm were most likely to occur during the night with 61% committed between the hours of 6pm-3am. Additionally, the percentage of crimes is higher during the hours that school is not in session (after 3pm and before 6am), with 83% of the homicide committed during this time.

Figure 10-3 shows the 2000-2004 percentages of *violent firearm* crimes by day of the week.

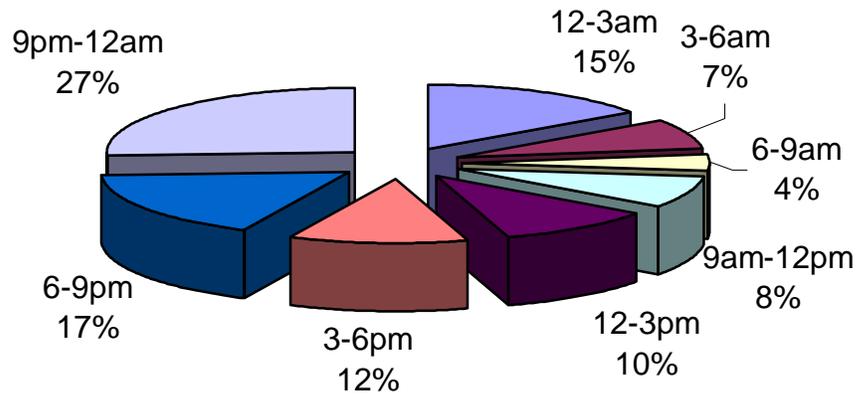


Source: Palm Beach County Medical Examiner Records

As Figure 10-3 shows, most violent firearm crimes were committed on either a Friday (18%) or a Saturday (16%). Violent firearm crimes were least likely to occur on a Thursday (12%). However—contrary to expectation—there was not a substantially higher concentration of violent gun crimes on weekend nights, as evidenced by the minimal variation across the days of the week.

Figure 10-4 shows the 2000-2004 percentages of *violent firearm* crimes by time of day.

Figure 10-4
Percent of Violent Firearm Crimes by Time of Day: 2000-2004



Source: Palm Beach County Medical Examiner Records

Figure 10-4 shows that—similar to firearm homicides—most violent firearm crimes were committed during the hours of 9pm-12am (27%). Violent firearm crimes were most likely to occur during the night hours, with 59% committed between the hours of 6pm and 3am. Additionally, once again, the percentage of violent firearm crimes is higher during the hours that school is not in session (after 3pm and before 6am), with 78% of the violent firearm crimes committed during this time.

This section showed that the vast majority of homicides in Palm Beach County are committed with handguns or firearms. This data, then, appears to affirm what those in the criminal justice field were already well aware: guns are the most commonly used weapon in fatal violent crime. This section also highlights the need to address the issue of the firearm availability, particularly among those who are most likely to be involved in violent crime. It was also discovered that the majority of homicides and other violent

crimes involving a firearm were committed between 6pm in the evening and 6am in the morning, especially the hours between 9pm and 12am. A more surprising finding is the fact that, although violent crimes with a firearm are most common on Friday, these offenses tend to be disbursed throughout the week rather evenly rather than being concentrated in the weekend.

11. Summary and Conclusions

Overall, these data supports the position that gun-related violent crime and homicide is a cause for concern in Palm Beach County. While the overall crime rate has consistently declined over the past fifteen years, violent crime (including those involving guns) have broken this pattern and appear to have reached a plateau in recent years. More distressing is the finding that the murder rate in Palm Beach County has increased substantially since 2003 and does not show any signs of decreasing, while the percent of murders involving guns has also been higher recently than in previous years.

Interestingly, however, Palm Beach County's 2004 violent crime rate is not alarming when compared to five counties with similarly large urban populations, although Palm Beach County does appear to have experienced more of a problem with violent crime involving firearms. In other words, Palm Beach County reported the second lowest rate of violent crime, but the third lowest rate of violent crime involving guns. Moreover, Palm Beach County had the third lowest reduction in violent crime over the past five years. In addition, Palm Beach County and the five comparison counties have similar rates of law enforcement officers, and this figure has been remarkably stable throughout the past decade. Thus, Palm Beach County's gun violence and homicide

problem does not appear to be attributable to the decreased or insufficient presence of law enforcement officers.

These data also showed that violent crime offenders in Palm Beach County tend to be adolescents and young adults, primarily between the ages of 15 and 24. They are also generally male and black. Murder offenders also tend to be largely adolescents and young adults, usually ranging in age from 15 to 29, and this appears to be a stable trend over the past several years. Furthermore, murderers generally appear to have extensive prior records beginning in early adulthood and comprised largely of violent, property and drug offenses, and a noteworthy amount of arrests for failure to abide by orders of the court or conditions of probation. Importantly, over the past two decades, the number of prior offenses of murderers have increased substantially, reaching a peak of approximately 13 prior offenses in 2005.

Even more troubling are the findings regarding demographic changes in the resident population in Palm Beach County. In particular, Palm Beach County is projected to continue its trend of a consistently expanding population over the next several years. More important is the fact that those demographic groups most likely to be involved in violent crime and murder are precisely the demographic groups that are projected to increase the most, which is an ominous possibility.

Another interesting finding is that the victims of these violent crimes generally bear remarkable demographic similarities to their assailants. The victims of violent crime are generally between the ages of 15 and 24, male, and black. Similarly, the victims of homicides are also generally male, although more of these victims are white than black. Additionally, it was found that offenders and victims are usually related, either by marriage or blood. Specifically, over 50% of homicide incidents where the relationship

between the offender and victim was known involved spouses and parent-child relationships.

A final set of results demonstrated that guns are the most commonly used weapon in homicides; in particular, handguns and firearms. Knives, however, are somewhat more common than rifles or shotguns. In addition, the vast majority of homicides and violent firearm crimes occur at night, usually between the hours of 9pm and 12am. Although the day of week does not appear to be strongly related to the commission of violent crime, slightly more of these offenses are committed on Fridays and Saturdays than on other days.

In sum, it appears that the problem of gun violence in Palm Beach County—while perhaps exaggerated in media accounts—is in fact established by official statistics. Homicides especially have increased at an alarming rate in recent years. While these findings may appear to depict a rather grim prognosis for the future safety of Palm Beach County residents, further analyses revealed that these crimes exhibit a series of patterns conducive to targeted interventions.

First, young black males are clearly the most heavily involved in these violent crimes, both as perpetrators and victims (with the exception of the greater numbers of white victims of violent crime). Second, these offenders are clearly not strangers to the criminal justice system. Rather, the current average murder arrestee has had 13 prior arrests, many of which were for violent offenses and failure to abide by court orders. Third, the offenders and victims involved in these violent crimes appear to be related either by law or blood, which means that violent crime victims are most likely to be victimized by someone with whom they are intimately acquainted, rather than by a stranger. Further, combined with earlier findings, the domestic nature characteristic of

the relationship between offenders and victims suggests that many of these violent crimes probably occur in or near the homes of those most likely to be involved in these crimes: young black males. This conjecture receives further support by the finding that most of these violent offenses are intra-racial rather than inter-racial.

Targeted intervention may be further facilitated by the temporal patterns previously identified. Essentially, these violent gun crimes are clearly concentrated at night and, to a lesser extent, on Friday and Saturday. Gun availability is another issue, as handguns and firearms are by far the most commonly used weapons in homicide events. In sum, although this section reports that violent gun crime is indeed a serious problem in Palm Beach County, it also identified several areas in which intervention efforts could most efficiently realize success.

Section II: Violence Reduction Initiatives in U.S. Cities: Their Strategies and Outcomes

Introduction

Youth gun violence has reached epidemic proportions in our country. Too many children feel unsafe in their own neighborhoods and schools. Then Attorney General, Janet Reno, felt that this should be part of the national conscience, “At the Federal level, and especially at the State and local level, we must implement comprehensive strategies that address not just the consequences of violence, but also it’s underlying causes” (Bilchik, 1999: iii). It is not enough to merely increase punishment. The causes of urban youth violence must be determined through sound empirical research. Current programs must also be evaluated empirically to determine best practices for this subset of youthful offenders.

The rise in youth gun violence occurred mainly in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Much of this violence has since slowed down, yet this does not mean a problem does not still exist. This is a new and unique problem that requires innovative initiatives and programs in order to reduce its prevalence. “One aspect of the attention young offenders are getting the 1990s is brand new, rather than merely a cyclical recurrence. For the first time in modern history, middle-adolescent offenders are being identified as a high-risk and high usage group for firearms” (Zimring, 1996: 25).

In cities all across the country, there was such an unprecedented surge in gun homicides and violence among America’s youth that was alarming to both citizens and those who have to deal with these situations on a daily basis. “The volume of homicide arrests in the age groups ten to seventeen more than doubled between 1984 and

1992...the volume of homicide arrests in 1992 was nearly double any pre-1988 year” (Zimring, 1996: 27). This problem had reached epidemic proportions. For example, “between 1985 and 1991, arrest rates for criminal homicide increased 140% among thirteen-and fourteen-year-old males, 217% among fifteen-year-old males, 158% among sixteen-year-old males, and 121% among seventeen-year-old males” (Ruttenberg, 1994: 1892).

This upsurge in violence seemed to affect a particular subset of Americans. “Most youth homicides involve males and guns, are intraracial, and occur between acquaintances” (Ruttenberg, 1994: 1894). Whereas disputes among this group may have been common previously, the introduction of firearms created a new dynamic. It seems that, “the epidemic of youth violence is caused by the escalation of ordinary adolescent disputes to lethal violence as a consequence of the ready availability of guns” (Moore & Tonry, 1998: 1). It may have started out as a phenomenon associated with gangs and drug-dealers, but proliferated and eventually grew to other subsets of youth. “The arming of both drug-dealing and non-drug-dealing gangs produced both dangerous conditions on the street and a cultural style that encouraged many other kids to arm themselves in response” (Moore and Tonry, 1998: 16). It was out of safety and perceived necessity that many youth began to carry guns.

Since the advent of this phenomenon, many communities have installed various programs to combat the violence. These programs vary, tapping different resources, involving different departments and businesses, and relying on various research and precedent. Many communities have administered comprehensive programs, addressing prevention, intervention, and reintegration. It seems that these types of programs are most beneficial. “Comprehensive community-wide strategies for the prevention of violence

hold particular promise” (Howell and Hawkins, 1998: 263). In addition, it seems that, “promising lines of attack depend crucially on a more generalized process of community mobilization, within which a variety of different programs targeted on different risk factors might be created and sustained” (Moore and Tonry, 1998: 19).

Although programs and strategies employed by other cities may be influential and beneficial when planning, it should be noted that each community possesses its own strengths and weaknesses. Precedent should guide initiatives, but committees should take into consideration the unique dynamics of their own environment. Prevention and intervention programs should, “meet local problems and respond to local concerns and capabilities, and [be] supported by some combination of private and public resources organized through networks mobilized by concern for the problem” (Moore and Tonry, 1998: 20).

Many risk factors for youth violence have been identified by previous research. These factors contribute to the likelihood of violence, but cannot be described as causes. “Huizinga and Jakob-Chien (1998) found that the likelihood of violent offending was more than doubled when victimization experiences were combined with school failure and mental health problems in adolescence” (Howell and Hawkins, 1998: 268). Therefore, it seems that a comprehensive program that incorporates mental health and school initiatives could be very beneficial.

There are also many risk factors associated with family life and family management styles. Parenting practices, “including parents’ failure to set clear expectations for children’s behavior, failure to supervise and monitor children, and excessively severe, harsh, or inconsistent punishment have been found to increase risk for early aggressive behavior and offending” (Howell and Hawkins, 1998: 270). For this

reason parenting classes and family counseling should be an integral part of any youthful violence reduction strategy.

In addition to family life, neighborhood disorganization and violence can lead to excessively violent youth. It has been shown that, “Disorganized and impoverished neighborhoods may contribute both to the development of life-course-persistent violence and to the spread of violence during adolescence” (Howell and Hawkins, 1998: 271). Programs with community involvement and integration as well as redevelopment may lead residents to have a higher stake in their community and deter violence. Comprehensive programs should involve community residents to create a sense of ownership. This community ownership is essential to the successful implementation of any intervention.

In order to create ownership and interest within the community, interventions should be aimed at the specific community they are intended to impact. “Interventions must be able to reach and communicate effectively with the population they seek to serve.” (Howell and Hawkins, 1998: 301). Therefore, in addition to research influencing the development of initiatives, the particular culture and lifestyle of an area should be taken into consideration when implementing strategies.

Although it is necessary to use research and precedent to address the particular needs of the community, involvement of various citizen groups, committees comprised of personnel from law enforcement, judicial, correctional agencies, and other groups that can affect the problem of gun violence is essential. Committees must make certain that the initiatives are being implemented continuously and correctly. In order for change to occur, trained personnel must adhere to and support the initiative on a continuous basis. “All staff require regular in-service training, supportive supervision, and sufficient

compensation in order to provide quality services, engage families and children in the intervention, and alleviate job stress” (Howell and Hawkins, 1998: 302). It is not enough to create a sound and research-driven program, implementation and effective training of all personnel is essential.

The programs listed below employ a variety of measures to combat crime in their areas. Still, many of them have similar initiatives and have had success through similar programs. The ten programs chosen have been exemplary in the area of violent crime reduction, especially youthful offender gun crime. The programs outlined originate in cities that span the country and have circumstances and problems specific to their communities. Although, these initiatives are good indicators of successful programs, it is essential that each community develop their own program according to their specific needs.

1. The Boston Gun Project/Operation Ceasefire: Boston, Massachusetts

This initiative was created in response to an increase in violent crime among the urban youth of Boston. There was a spike in youth homicide in Boston between the late 1980s and 1990s. “Boston youth homicide (ages 24 and under) increased 230%-from 22 victims in 1987 to 73 victims in 1990” (Welch, 2005: 1). Due to this spike in youth homicide, Boston created Operation Ceasefire and The Boston Gun Project through a sponsorship with the National Institute of Justice.

The Boston Gun Project began in 1995 with cooperation between Harvard University and the Boston Police Department. Soon after, Operation Ceasefire was created in 1996. The Boston Gun Project was an interagency group focused on market disruption and the diversion of new handguns. This initiative was designed to limit the

availability of guns to all criminals in Boston. The Project accomplished this by increasing focus on traffickers, attempting to restore destroyed serial numbers, communication between group members and with known gang members, and use of IBIS ballistics technology. There was a “23% reduction in the monthly percentage of recovered crime handguns that were new” (The Boston Gun Project and Operation Ceasefire, 4) as a result of the initiative.

Operation Ceasefire was developed as a result of qualitative and quantitative research that identified a small number of gang-involved youth with semi-automatic pistols predominantly responsible for the increase in youth homicides. The Operation included The Youth Violence Strike Force (YVSF). YVSF was an interagency alliance that met biweekly to discuss efforts. The group was “comprised of law enforcement personnel, youth workers, and members of Boston’s Ten Point Coalition of activist black clergy” (The Boston Gun Project and Operation Ceasefire, 2).

Operation Ceasefire employed the “pulling levers” approach and used deterrence strategies focused on gang-involved youth. The Operation reached out to gang members and made it clear that gun violence would no longer be tolerated. Ceasefire members spread the zero tolerance of violence message to gang members in various ways: police had formal meetings with gangs, probation officers met with their clients, gang outreach workers spoke to members.

This initiative was quite successful in reducing youth homicide and limiting the amount of new and available guns. There was a significant decrease in the amount of youth homicide in Boston immediately after the program was implemented. “A U.S. National Institute of Justice sponsored evaluation found that the Ceasefire intervention was associated with a 63% reduction in Boston youth homicide and similar large

reductions in non-fatal serious gun violence” (The Boston Gun Project and Operation Ceasefire, 3). The downward turn in the amount of youth homicide continued for the duration of the program, until 2000. Subsequently, Boston tried to expand the efforts of Ceasefire beyond gang members, to repeat offenders, hot spots, and criminogenic families. Since the youth homicide spike was predominantly a result of gang violence, homicide went back up with the dilution of Ceasefire.

2. Oakland Firearms Licensee Compliance Program: Oakland, California

The amount of violent crimes committed with firearms in Oakland increased during the 1980s and 1990s. There were also a large amount of Federal Firearms Licensees (FFL’s) selling guns illegally. In 1994 Oakland created two programs through its Weapons Unit funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Oakland Police Department (OPD) joined with the Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) to form the Firearms Licensee Compliance Program. This allowed the OPD to more closely monitor people applying for new or renewed Federal firearm licenses and ensured that gun dealers abided by all Federal, State and local gun laws. In addition, Oakland established a Firearms Trafficking Program in an effort to reduce the amount of illegally traded guns and dealers.

Both programs were created in an effort to reduce violent gun crime “by reducing the availability of firearms, reducing the number of illegally purchased firearms, eliminating firearms businesses that operate in residential neighborhoods, and reducing the number of firearm dealers” (Bilchik 1999, 79). They tackled these problems by performing intensive background checks for all firearms license applicants and ensuring

that all licensees had obtained OPD permits. The Weapons Unit created a database to track multiple gun sales, and traced all confiscated guns.

With these initiatives, in combination with ATF's Operation Triggerlock, Oakland experienced some success in reducing the number of licenses issued. Oakland "reduced the number of FFL's from 57 to 6 during the 2-year period from 1994 to 1996. The unit completed more than 3,000 firearm traces and investigated 28 straw purchasers" (Bilchik, 1999: 80). This initiative is helpful in reducing the amount of available guns on the black market, but does not necessarily combat the specific problem of violent crime.

3. The Kansas City Gun Experiment: Kansas City, Missouri

This initiative was created as a federally funded "Weed and Seed" program in 1991. The Kansas City Police Department (KCPD) was largely allowed to plan the program strategy, and chose reduction of gun crime as their predominant goal. The program was centered on the belief that increased implementation of existing laws and additional patrols to enforce them would increase the amount of gun seizures and reduce the amount of crime. The initiative targeted a specific patrol area with a large amount of drive-by shootings. The police concentrated their efforts on gun crime hot spots within the targeted neighborhood, determined by crime mapping.

The police involved in the initiative were proactive and were not involved in other service calls. The police increased the amount of car checks, pedestrian checks, and time on the streets. The increased police presence resulted in an increase of "total guns found in the beat by 65 percent over the previous 6 month period and almost tripl[ed] the number of guns found during car checks" (Sherman, et al, 1995: 6). Of the guns seized during the program, almost all were permanently removed or destroyed. Gun crime,

drive-by shootings, and homicide all decreased in the beat as compared to the previous six months and activity in surrounding beats. Still, though gun crimes decreased, “Neither total calls for police service, calls about violence, property or disorder crimes, total offense reports, nor property or violent offenses showed any effect of the increased patrol” (Sherman, et al, 1995: 7).

The police involved in this initiative were to increase patrols and focus on enforcement of gun control laws. The amount of available guns decreased, but not necessarily the amount of violent crime. Still, this initiative shows that the amount of guns and gun crimes can be reduced with marginal police effort.

4. The Detroit Handgun Intervention Program: Detroit, Michigan

Judge Willie G. Lipscomb felt there was an increase in availability of guns among young black men and sought to change the rising trend of gun violence through the implementation of the Handgun Intervention Program (HIP). Through HIP, youthful offenders caught with a concealed weapon would be mandated to complete a course in which they learned the negative consequences of gun violence and took personal responsibility, as a condition of pretrial release.

The HIP initiative consisted of four hour long Saturday classes held in a courtroom focused on “issues of personal choice, individual responsibility, and the role of nonviolence in African-American history” (Roth, 1998: 1). Participants were shown slides of gun murder victims, given information about handguns, given presentations by older felons, addressed by Judge Lipscomb, and offered to take an optional vow of nonviolence. An evaluation was completed by each participant measuring seven categories of gun-related attitudes and knowledge, such as risks, ethics, status,

responsibility, and avoidance of violence (Roth, 1998). Attitudes and knowledge improved on almost of all of the measures.

In an NIJ study it was found that HIP affected urban minority youths' attitudes in the short run, but "many participants questioned whether their behavior would change because they felt the dangers of the street required them to carry a gun" (Roth, 1998: 1). It seems that although HIP may have an effect on gun-related attitudes, the effect was marginal. In combination with other initiatives, a program such as this may be more successful.

5. Project Exile: Richmond, Virginia

Project Exile employed the idea that a more strict application of laws already in place would significantly alter gun violence. Michael Janofsky states that Project Exile was responsible for reversing "a decade of rising crime rates in Richmond by moving gun offenses into the federal system, where bond is less available, sentences are longer, and convicts are sent out of state to serve their terms" (1999: 1). This initiative aggressively enforced already existing laws instead of attempting to create new ones.

Project Exile elicited the help of various community leaders in order to proliferate the message that carrying illegal weapons would be met with stricter punishments. Billboard, radio and television advertisements warned would-be criminals of the harsher sentences. It was determined that gun offenses can become federal territory if the offender is also in possession of drugs, a convicted felon, an illegal alien, or convicted of domestic violence.

During the first two years of implementation, Project Exile led to "the recovery of 475 illegal guns, indictments against 404 people on gun charges, a conviction rate of 86

percent through trials and plea bargains, and an average prison term of more than four and a half years” (Janofsky, 1999: 2). The police felt that more criminals were leaving their guns at home, due to more recovery of guns in houses than on the streets. This initiative may have influenced the amount of people carrying guns on the streets, but not necessarily decreased the amount of violent crime.

6. Juvenile Gun Court: Birmingham, Alabama

Judge Sandra H. Storm recognized the spike in juvenile deaths in Birmingham in the 1990s and identified the need to implement a specific court to handle juvenile gun cases. This court would ensure swift, certain, and fair repercussions for juvenile gun offenders. The court was integrated into the Family Court already in place.

Only first time juvenile offenders qualified for Gun Court, others were transferred to adult court or boot camp. Gun Court hearings were held within 72 hours and any juvenile who plead “true” was sent to the High Intensive Training (HIT) program, a boot camp in Alabama. Once released, juveniles were placed on maximum supervision probation and required to complete a preventative substance abuse program. Probation and police officers combined forces and made surprise nighttime visits to probationers through the Operation Nighttime Crime Eradicators (ONCE) program.

This initiative focused on involvement of family and presentation of social services and various resources available to deter recidivism. Parents of juveniles involved in Gun Court are mandated to complete a seven-week workshop with their child. In addition to family involvement, Gun Court staff made presentations at schools and community meetings, warning of the consequences of gun violence. As a result of this program gun crimes and deaths involving guns decreased. “Juvenile gun offenses

dropped from 323 cases in 1995 to 302 in 1997; gun related deaths were almost cut in half, from 30 in 1995 to 18 in 1997” (Bilchik, 1999: 6). Juvenile gun-related offenses in Birmingham dropped and those juveniles processed in the Gun Court were less likely to recidivate.

7. Buffalo Weed and Seed Initiative: Buffalo, New York

Buffalo experienced a spike in violent crime similar to that in most of America during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In addition to an increase in crime, Buffalo’s experienced a significant decrease in its resident population. The drop in population left many abandoned houses and buildings, creating a number of ‘drug dens’ (Bilchik, 1999). In addition to a serious drug problem, Buffalo had a number of gangs operating within the city. This combination of criminal elements created a distressed community. Although Buffalo experienced the decline of violent crime in the mid-1990s, through targeting gangs in the high-crime areas, the city felt a comprehensive sustained approach was imperative to effect a permanent reduction in violent crime.

Buffalo applied for and received a U.S. Department of Justice Weed and Seed grant. Under this grant Buffalo had to elicit the help of its residents in suggesting crime prevention and reduction strategies as well as community redevelopment. The Buffalo Police Department was to work with various community organizations and businesses to target serious offenders and restore neighborhoods.

The program targeted Buffalo’s inner city, where residents experienced the highest homicide, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, and infant mortality rates (Bilchik, 1999). The intervention was comprised of two components: the Weed component and the Seed component. The Weed component initiated the Gun Abatement Program, designed

to reduce the number of available guns by targeting dealers in the high crime areas. The police practiced street-based confiscations and worked closely with the district attorney's office to prosecute these crimes. The Seed component included the Safe Haven program, an intervention and prevention program with services including, "job skills training, family service referrals, adult literacy programs, tutoring, firearm prevention education, and recreational programming" (Bilchik, 1999: 39).

Buffalo also employed other programs to combat the high levels of youth violence in their city. The police department used the First Time/Last Time approach to keep first time offenders from becoming repeat offenders. The attendance improvement model (AIM) and a Curfew Ordinance Enforcement project were also implemented to more closely monitor youth both in and out of school. The cumulative effects of these various programs have shown success since their implementation. Homicides in Buffalo decreased by 38 percent and aggravated assaults by 36 percent.

8. Comprehensive Homicide Initiative: Richmond, California

Richmond is one of the communities belonging to the East Bay Public Safety Corridor Partnership (EBPSCP). Richmond implemented a multi-faceted crime reduction program in cooperation with other EBPSCP communities. The program sought to reduce drug and gang related crime in Richmond and additional communities in the partnership.

During the early 1990s Richmond experienced a murder rate much higher than the national average. In order to attack this problem, Richmond instituted a citywide murder reduction strategy (Bilchik, 1999). The strategy was formulated based on the findings of the 1992 International Association of Chiefs of Police *Murder in America Summit Study*, and included: intervention, community policing, an advisory committee, community

involvement, incentive programs, safe havens/after-school programs, police training, and school involvement (Bilchik, 1999).

Richmond employed enforcement-based strategies to meet the problem head on. The police obtained assistance from the DEA and FBI to review cold cases, focus on high profile homicides, monitor gang members and drug dealers, and improve information sharing. A public housing initiative was also developed in order to deter gangs and drug dealers from various community developments. Evictions and renovations were used to dissuade residents from becoming involved with violent criminals.

This collaborative and cumulative approach of various intervention and prevention strategies helped to reduce the incidence of violent crime in Richmond. The comprehensive homicide initiative resulted in a 40 percent reduction of aggravated assaults. In addition, the homicide rate was reduced by 58 percent.

9. Minnesota HEALS (Hope, Education, and Law and Safety): Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota

Honeywell Inc., a privately owned company, was called to action in response to an article dubbing Minneapolis ‘Murderapolis’. *The New York Times* penned this name in reaction to Minneapolis’ steep increase in homicide. As a result, the HEALS initiative was created. This program is different from others in that it was created upon a public-private partnership.

Honeywell contacted others businesses in the area and joined forces to involve the governor in tackling the gun violence problem in Minnesota. Local businesses contributed human resources as well as financial support. In addition, Honeywell contacted an independent consultant. These various organizations and people formed a

group that determined the preventive and law enforcement objectives that would be implemented. The group termed their violence reduction strategy Hope, Education, and Law and Safety (HEALS) and first met in 1997 (Bilchik, 1999).

Two task forces were created by HEALS, the Law Enforcement Task Force and Community Task Force. Both task forces met as often as needed. The Law Enforcement Task Force conducted a study of homicide in Minneapolis and found that there was a link between the incidence of violent crime and gangs. It was also found that most victims and perpetrators were male African American youth with prior arrest histories. Firearms were used in the majority of homicides in Minneapolis. These data led the task force to focus on specific repeat offender gang members and guns.

In addition, two committees were created. The Forum Committee made presentations and was open to all members, making suggestions to the other committees. The Support Committee was composed of various community members including both corporate and criminal justice personnel. This committee consisted of 29 members and met monthly to make decisions about fundraising and outlined objectives.

The Law Enforcement Task Force took cues from Boston's Operation Ceasefire and created a rapid response team that focused on gang shootings that had the opportunity to elicit retaliations. The team consisted of law enforcement, prosecutors and probation officers. The team warned gang members of swift and sure punishments as a result of any violence, possibly even federal sanctions.

Minneapolis also created the Minneapolis Anti-Violence Initiative (MAVI) based upon the strategies used in Boston (Bilchik, 1999). MAVI was a version of Boston's Operation Night Light and paired police with probation officers. The teams made

unannounced nighttime visits to probationers and worked with the courts to install more stringent restrictions.

ATF agents and police officers paired up to investigate every gun homicide. They traced all recovered guns and investigated any suspicious results. These gun traces helped with illegal gun use and trafficking prosecution. ATF agents also participated in saturation patrols in hot spots. The programs were installed to remove as many guns as possible from the streets. In addition, a statewide gang task force was created to stop the proliferation of gangs.

As a result of the combination of these programs and the installation of HEALS, Minneapolis experienced a 30 percent decrease in homicides (Bilchik, 1999). With the success of these initiatives, Minnesota has institutionalized certain programs such as HEALS and MAVI. HEALS has also become involved in many community prevention and intervention programs, including afterschool programs, job placement, and housing.

10. Youth Firearms Violence Initiative: Seattle, Washington

Like most of the previous cities mentioned, Seattle experienced an increase in juvenile violence during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Similar to other cities, Seattle found that these incidents were primarily committed by a small group of repeat offenders. As a result of the increase in violence, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) created a community policing program called the Youth Firearms Violence Initiative.

Prior to the introduction of the Youth Firearms Violence Initiative in 1996, Seattle had instituted a variety of other programs. These prevention and intervention programs included the Seattle Team for Youth (STFY). STFY provided social services, counseling,

and various support services to gang members and other at-risk youth. In addition, the Options, Choices, and Consequences program taught eighth and ninth graders about gun safety (Bilchik, 1999).

Seattle police focused their efforts on local schools. The police department created School Enforcement Teams (SET). Each SET worked with the administrators in their school and identified specific problems. Crime mapping helped officers to locate problem areas in neighborhoods and areas around their schools.

Fifty juveniles were identified as the most violent chronic offenders. A system was developed to track these juveniles, including a notebook index that contained information about their offenses, gang affiliations, and probationary conditions. Seattle, like other cities, also paired policemen with probation officers and through an improved communication they were able to increase observation of and attention given to the identified violent offenders.

Seattle's combination of programs, involvement in schools, and focus on chronic offenders resulted in a reduction of crime and firearm violations. The Seattle Police Department "reported 139 weapons violations and 77 arrests made specifically through the program" (Bilchik 1999, 124). In addition, weapons violations in school declined by 23 percent.

Summary and Discussion

Through the examination of multiple agencies across America, it becomes clear that there are certain programs that are more beneficial and influential. Programs should be comprehensive. They should have prevention, intervention, and reintegration initiatives. In addition, any program developed should include the community at all

stages. The community should be involved in both the planning and implementation stages. Further, even with positive initial results, a program should be long term in order to create lasting effects and safer neighborhoods.

It seems that certain elements in comprehensive, community-wide programs lead to an increased likelihood of reduced violence. When police officers are combined with probation officers and have a heightened level of communication, youth violence tends to decrease. Family counseling, after school programs, and other preventive programming aids in changing behaviors before arrest and providing positive outlets. Furthermore, increased police presence and identification of gangs and other violent youth groups allows police to spot a problem before it occurs. Community policing and enhanced nighttime patrols shows would-be criminals that their behavior will not be tolerated, and provides a feeling of safety to other residents. Many of these initiatives may fix a part or piece of the problem, but a comprehensive program, one that combines as many initiatives as possible, is best.

Although the problems of Palm Beach County, Florida may mirror those of many other communities, it is essential that a specific and unique community-wide program be installed. Since a problem group has been identified as youthful African American males, similar to that of many of the cities described, it is possible that many of the initiatives presented will be influential and beneficial. Prevention and intervention strategies on a large scale and for a prolonged period in combination with school based strategies, increased law enforcement, enhanced application of the law, and communication among agencies would, according to the prior research, have a significant impact upon the gun violence in Palm Beach County.