

## **PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS FACT SHEET**

### **Early Violent Death Among Delinquent Youth**



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#### **The Problem**

Between 1990 and 2000 public attention was focused on mass school shootings that accounted for fifty-two deaths. Stuningly, during this time 840 inner city youth between the ages of fourteen and seventeen were victims of violent deaths. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, homicide is the second leading cause of death for youths fifteen to twenty-four years of age in the United States. This phenomenon becomes an even greater concern when we consider that among African American youth, homicide is the most common cause of death.

Therefore, the objective of this (Teplin, McClelland, Abram, and Mileusnic, 2005) was to compare mortality rates for delinquent youth with mortality rates for the general youth population. This work is an advancement over previous studies of early violent death among delinquent youth since other investigations neglected to include racial ethnic minorities and did not include females.

#### **Method**

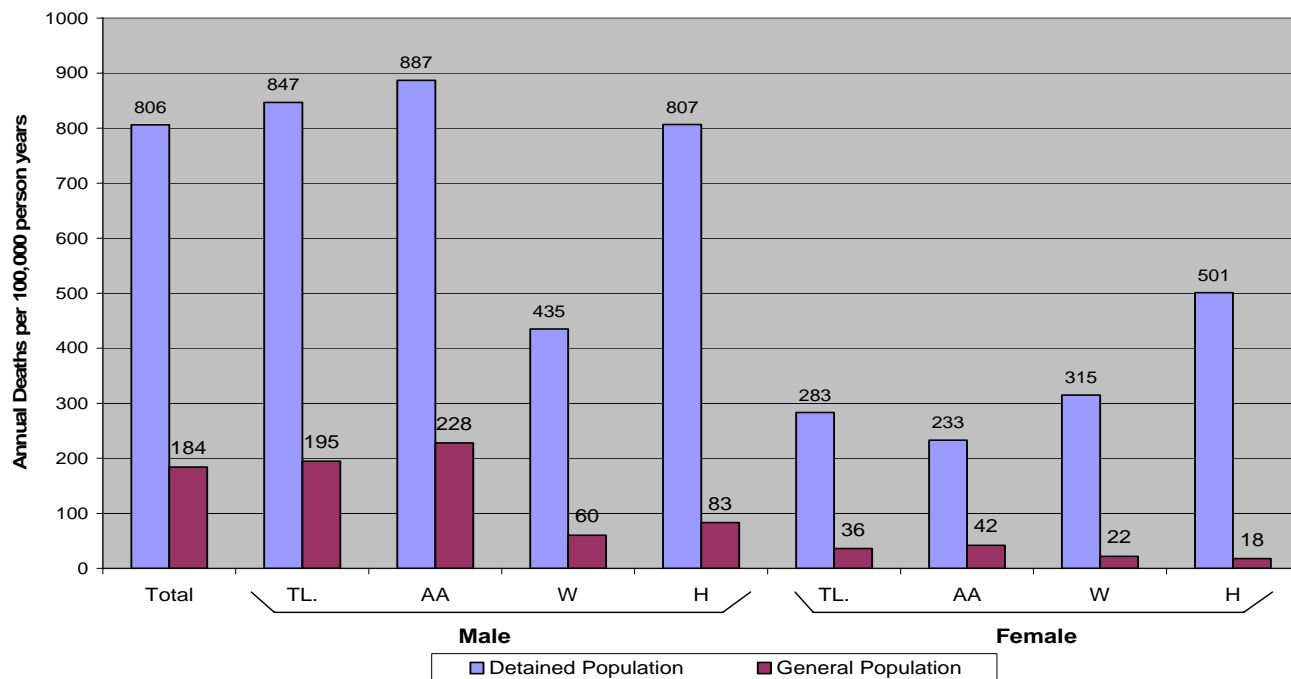
Recently a study conducted at Northwestern University compared and contrasted mortality rates of 1,829 randomly selected delinquent youths (1,172 male and 657 female) at the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Chicago, Illinois. The youth were between the ages of ten and eighteen and a comparable sample of general-population youth in Cook County were 15 to 24 years of age. The sample included 1,005 African-American, 295 non-Hispanic white, 524 Hispanic, and four other-race/ethnicity subjects. Data on deaths and causes of death that occurred during the time of monitoring (average of 7.1 years) were verified by the Cook County Medical Examiner's office and by obtaining copies of death certificates. Mortality ratios were calculated by comparing the mortality rates of delinquent youth with those of the general population of Cook County, controlling for differences in gender, race/ethnicity, and age.

#### **Results**

During the follow-up period sixty-five youths were victims of early violent deaths. While all the deaths were from external causes, approximately 59 out of the 65 (91%) were victims of homicides and 93% of the deaths were a result of gunshot wounds. Other external causes included legal interventions (5.4%), suicides (1.1%), motor vehicle accidents (1.3%), and other accidents and external causes (2.1%).

*Information summarized from Teplin, McClelland, Abram, & Mileusnic (2005). Early violent death among delinquent youth: A prospective longitudinal study. Pediatrics, 115(6), 1586-1593.*

### Mortality Rates for Delinquent and Community Youth



- The table above indicates that the mortality rate of delinquent youth was four times greater than that of the general juvenile population in Cooke County (806 vs. 184 deaths).
- African American males had the highest mortality rate (887 deaths).
- Even more alarming was the mortality rate of delinquent female youth (283 deaths), which was eight times the female general population rate (36 deaths).

### Implications

- Early violent death, particularly among urban youth, is a health crisis and should be addressed with urgency as with any health disparity.
- Intervention and prevention are needed to reduce delinquency, violence and at risk behaviors such as physical fighting, carry weapons, and gang membership.
- Violence prevention interventions should be implemented in nontraditional settings. This will increase the likelihood of coming in contact with youth that are at the greatest risk (male youth, racial/ethnic minority youth, older teens, urban youth and youth who cycle through the juvenile justice system).
- Mental health services for high-risk youth should be improved.

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