

INJURY UPDATE

*A Report to Oklahoma Injury Surveillance Participants**

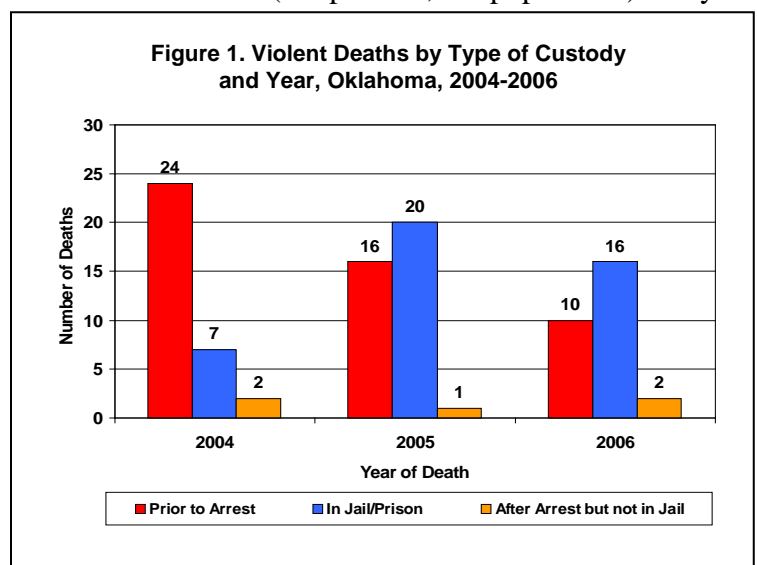
September 22, 2008

Violent Deaths in Custody, Oklahoma, 2004-2006

More than 2 million people are currently incarcerated in the United States (U.S.). According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 1983, suicide was the leading cause of death in jails and the third leading cause of death in prisons. From 1983 to 2002, the suicide rate in jails declined from 129 to 47 per 100,000 inmates, and the suicide rate in prisons declined from 34 to 14 per 100,000 prisoners. In 2002, the rate of suicide in local jails was more than 4 times higher than the rate of suicide among the U.S. population (11 per 100,000 population) and the rate of suicide in prisons was 27% higher than the U.S. rate. In contrast, the homicide rate in the general population (6 per 100,000 population) was higher than the homicide rate among persons in prisons or jails (4 and 3 per 100,000 inmates, respectively). Additionally, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that from 2003 to 2005 there were 1,095 persons killed by police officers acting in the line of duty and 234 arrest-related suicides.

Oklahoma is among 17 states funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to participate in the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS). The Oklahoma Violent Death Reporting System (OK-VDRS) is a statewide surveillance system that collects data from death certificates, medical examiner reports and law enforcement reports on homicides, suicides, undetermined manner deaths, legal interventions (police officers acting in the line of duty) and unintentional firearm deaths. The OK-VDRS includes a variable to track violent deaths that occur in public custody. OK-VDRS data were used to determine the characteristics, incidence and circumstances of violent deaths in public custody in Oklahoma that occurred in jails or prisons, after arrest but not in jail, and prior to arrest.

During 2004-2006, there were 98 violent deaths in custody in Oklahoma. Ninety-four percent of the decedents were male (1.8 per 100,000 population) and 6% were female (0.1 per 100,000 population). Fifty-one percent of deaths occurred prior to the decedent's arrest, 44% occurred in a jail or prison, and 5% occurred after arrest, but not in jail. The most common type of violent death in custody was suicide, accounting for 50% of deaths. Legal interventions accounted for 35% of deaths, homicide 12% and undetermined manner of death 3%. Suicide was the leading manner of violent death in jails and prisons (67%) and after arrest but not in jail (60%). The majority of violent deaths that occurred prior to arrest (64%) were legal interventions (Table 1). The rate of suicide in jails and prisons among Oklahoma's inmate population (40.5 per 100,000 inmates) was 2.8 times higher than the rate among the



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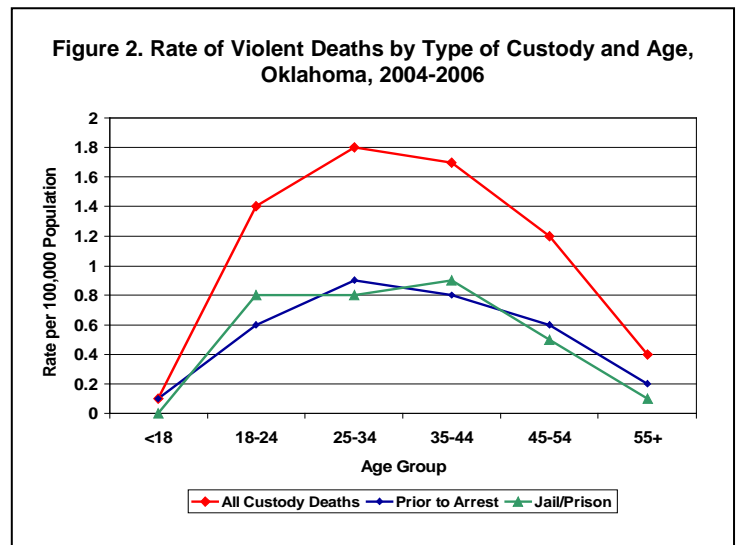
Table 1. Violent Deaths in Custody by Manner and Type of Custody, Oklahoma, 2004-2006

	Prior to Arrest		In Jail/Prison		After Arrest but not in Jail		All Violent Deaths	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Suicide	17	34%	29	67%	3	60%	49	50%
Legal Intervention	32	64%	-	-	2	40%	34	35%
Homicide	-	-	12	28%	-	-	12	12%
Undetermined Manner	1	2%	2	5%	-	-	3	3%
Total	50	100%	43	100%	5	100%	98	100%

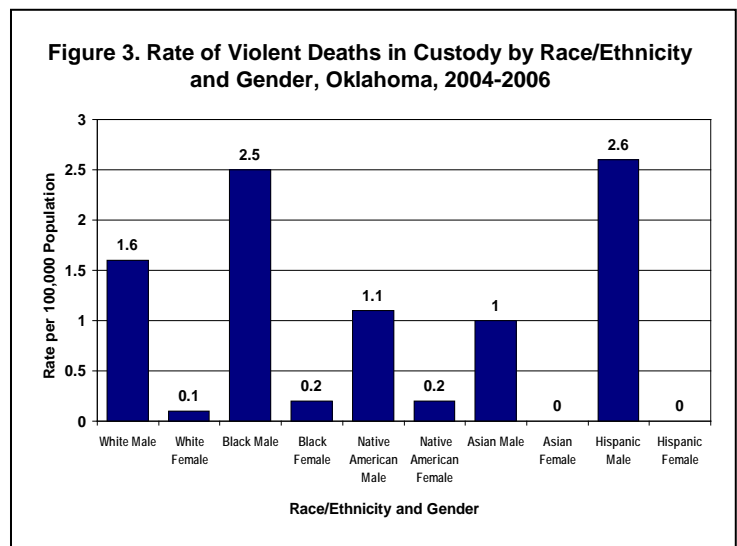
general population (14.7 per 100,000 population). The suicide rate among the male inmate population (42.0) was 1.5 times higher than the suicide rate among the female inmate population (27.2). The rate of homicide in jails and prisons among Oklahoma’s inmate population (16.8 per 100,000 inmates) was 2.8 times higher than the rate of homicide among the general population (6.0 per 100,000 population).

The number of persons who were injured and died prior to arrest declined from 24 in 2004 to 16 in 2005 and 10 in 2006, while the number of violent deaths in jails and prisons increased from 7 in 2004 to 20 in 2005 and 16 in 2006 (Figure 1).

The mean age of victims was 37 years (range = 15 to 73 years). The rate of all violent deaths in custody peaked among persons 25-44 years of age (1.8 per 100,000 population) and declined dramatically after age 44. The rate among persons 25-44 years was 3 times higher than the rate among persons of all other ages combined (0.6). Age-specific violent death rates of persons injured prior to arrest and those injured in jails or prisons were similar (Figure 2).



The rate of violent deaths in custody among blacks (1.3 per 100,000 population) was 2.6 times higher than the rate among Asians (0.5), 2.2 times higher than the rate among Native Americans (0.6) and 1.6% higher than the rate among whites (0.8). The rate among Hispanics was 1.8 times higher than among non-Hispanics (1.4 and 0.8, respectively). Hispanic males and black males had the highest rates of violent death in custody (Figure 3).



Forty percent of decedents were single, 26% were married, 26% were divorced, 4% were widowed, 1% were separated and for 3% marital status was unknown. The highest education level attained was examined for victims 24 years of age and older.

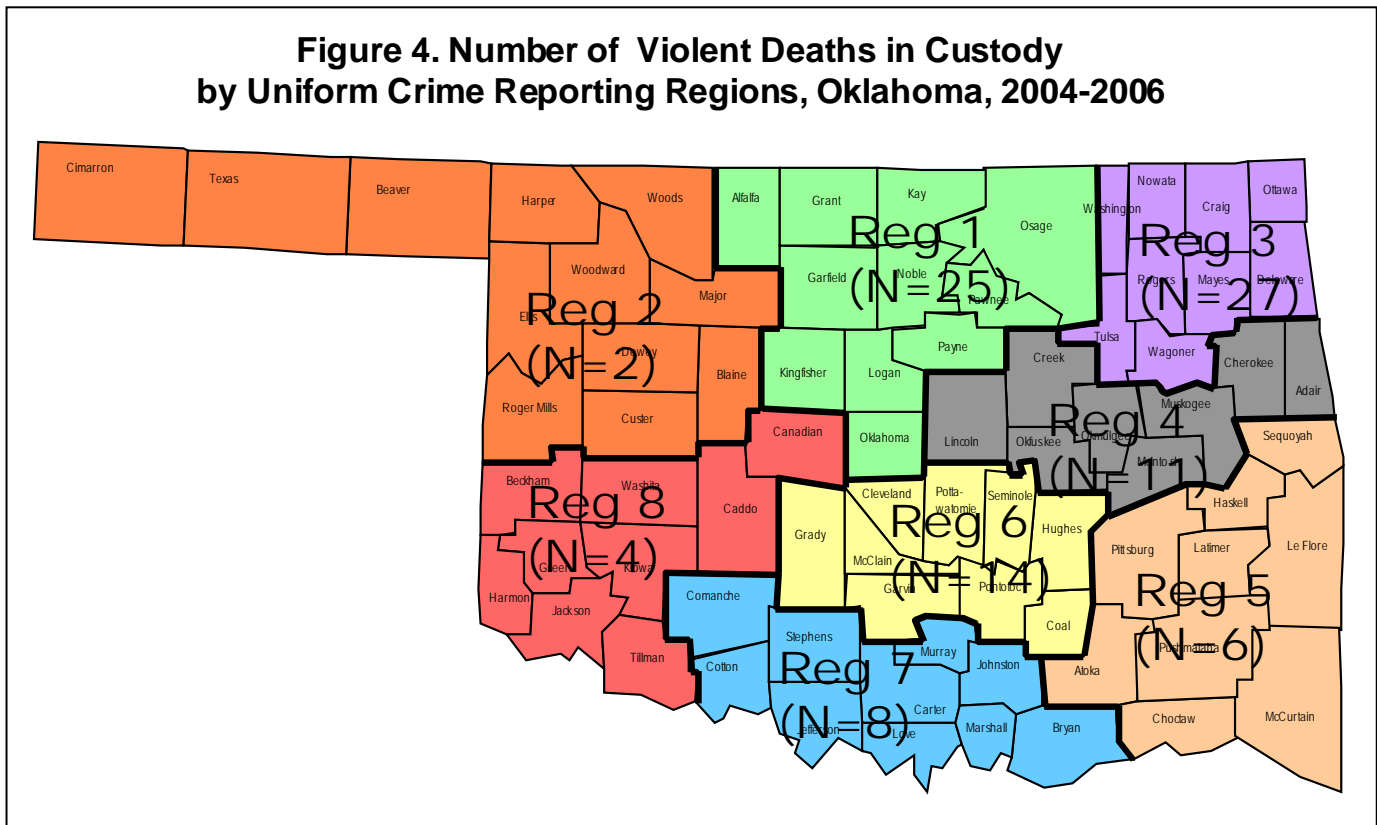
Among these persons (n=79), 43% had a high school education or GED, 38% had less than a high school degree or GED, 13% had some college, 4% had an associate or bachelor degree, and for 2% education level was unknown. Seventeen percent of decedents were veterans. For 30% of decedents, alcohol use was suspected or confirmed by toxicological test; 93% of these persons were male. Alcohol use was suspected or confirmed in 35% of persons killed in legal intervention incidents, 24% of persons who committed suicide in jails or prisons and 41% of persons who committed suicide prior to arrest.

The leading circumstances of suicide while in custody were a recent criminal legal problem (71%), a crisis within 2 weeks of the incident (53%), an intimate partner problem (24%), a mental health problem (22%) and a current depressed mood (16%). Among persons killed by a police officer acting in the line of duty, 85% had used a weapon against the officer, 82% had committed a serious crime, 18% were involved in intimate partner violence, and 15% involved gang or drug-related activities.

Firearms were used in the majority (51%) of violent deaths in custody. Other methods used to kill included hanging/strangulation (32%), sharp instruments (10%) and other or unknown types of weapons (e.g., blunt instrument, poisoning, personal weapon, fall) (8%). In jails or prisons, 72% of decedents died by hanging/strangulation. Firearms were used to kill in 92% of decedents injured prior to arrest.

Oklahoma is divided into 8 uniform crime reporting regions. Regions 1 and 3, which include Oklahoma and Tulsa counties respectively, had the highest numbers of violent deaths in custody; Region 2 had the lowest number of violent deaths in custody (Figure 4). In Region 1, 52% of violent deaths in custody were suicides, 28% were legal interventions, 16% were homicides and 4% were undetermined manner deaths. In Region 3, 56% of violent deaths in custody were suicides, 37% were legal interventions, 4% were homicides and 4% were undetermined manner deaths.

Figure 4. Number of Violent Deaths in Custody by Uniform Crime Reporting Regions, Oklahoma, 2004-2006



Case Briefs

- A 46-year-old male was found hanging in his jail cell by a sheet a day after he was incarcerated. He was not able to afford his custody bail. He had a history of mental illness and had disclosed his intent to commit suicide if he could not bail himself out.
- A 42-year-old male with a history of mental illness was arrested for a traffic violation. He was put into an isolation room at a jail. He was later found dead with the telephone cord tied around his neck.
- A 37-year-old male was serving a life sentence in prison. He was found hanging by a rope in his jail cell and was transported to a hospital where he died. He had a history of suicide attempts.
- A 29-year-old male was in a prison when another inmate assaulted him. He fell off some stairs and was taken to a hospital where he died.
- A 21-year-old male had threatened his cellmate with a homemade knife and took his property. The cellmate in turn strangled him.
- A 17-year-old male was involved in an armed robbery and carjacking. A police pursuit ensued and the decedent wrecked the car. The decedent ran away and came to a barrier he could not get over. He threatened the officer and was shot by him.
- A 30-year-old male had fired a weapon at another person. Police were chasing him when he shot himself in the head. He had threatened suicide in the past.
- A 27-year-old was wanted for murder and robbery. Police officers located his vehicle and were approaching when he fired at them. Officers fired back killing him.
- A 33-year-old male was under police guard at a hospital. Upon his discharge, he attempted to escape by holding a person hostage in his vehicle. He was shot by a police officer.

Prevention

Several factors have been associated with violent deaths in custody. Studies suggest that persons with mental illness are at greater risk of being killed during law enforcement intervention than persons without mental illness. Suicide in prisons has been associated with mental illness (especially depression), prior suicide attempts, substance abuse, being placed in a maximum security prison, and living in a single or isolation cell.

- Efforts to prevent legal intervention deaths include:
 - Training law enforcement officers on how to detect suicidal behavior and persons suffering from mental illness during an encounter.
 - Training law enforcement officers on how to interact with persons with mental illness.
 - Identifying and referring persons with mental illness for treatment in mental health facilities rather than sending them to jails.
- Efforts to prevent suicide in jails or prisons include:
 - Screening new inmates for suicide.
 - Training correctional officers to detect suicidal inmates and respond when an inmate displays suicidal behavior.
 - Referring inmates with mental illness to mental health facilities for proper care.
 - Monitoring suicidal inmates permanently.
 - Avoiding isolation for suicidal inmates.
 - Minimizing lethal means in jails or prisons, especially hanging points.