

# INJURY UPDATE

*A Report to Oklahoma Injury Surveillance Participants\**

August 5, 2005

## **Work-Related Homicides, Oklahoma, 1998-2004**

Work-related violence is a concern for occupational safety and health professionals. Nearly two million workers are victims of violent crime each year. The costs related to workplace violence are difficult to estimate, but are suspected to run into the billions of dollars. Included in the financial burden are lost work time, reduced productivity, health care costs, workers' compensation payments, legal expenses, and costs of security. Beyond economic consequences, employers and employees are faced with other costs and intangible effects, such as emotional and physical trauma and other long-term sequelae, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, sense of security issues, or disruption of trust.

Workplace violence typically falls into one of four broad categories, which include:

- (1) Violent acts committed by criminals with no other connection to the workplace than to enter for robbery or some other criminal purpose.
- (2) Violent acts toward employees committed by customers, clients, patients, students, or inmates who receive services from a particular organization.
- (3) Violent acts committed by present or former employees toward co-workers, supervisors, or managers.
- (4) Violent acts committed by someone who has a personal relationship with an employee, but is not employed by the workplace.

Nationally, homicide was one of the three most frequently occurring work-related fatal events between 1992 and 2003 (along with highway incidents and falls). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI), there was a total of 5,559 fatal work-related injuries in 2003, of which 631 deaths (11%) were homicides. The number of homicides in 2003 represented the first increase since 2000, yet remained 42% lower than the high of 1,080 deaths recorded in 1994 (excluding the number of work-related homicides resulting from the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks). In 2002, CFOI, in its 11<sup>th</sup> year, recorded the lowest number of workplace homicides ever—609 deaths.

Data collected by the Oklahoma Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (OKFACE) program were analyzed for the years 1998 through 2004 for this report. Cases included decedents who were working at the time of death and whose manner of death was homicide. Data sources included death certificates, Medical Examiner reports, Occupational Safety and Health Administration Fatality/Catastrophe reports, and newspaper clippings. Work was defined as activities engaged in for profit or compensation and included usual/full-time occupation, secondary/part-time occupation, unpaid family members working for a family business, and volunteers exposed to work conditions (e.g., firefighters, paramedics, and law enforcement).

In Oklahoma from 1998 to 2004, there were 64 incidents of work-related homicide and 66 victims. An average of nine homicides occurred in Oklahoma workplaces each year (average annual rate 0.59 deaths per 100,000 workers). The highest number of incidents and victims occurred in 2001, when 12 workers were

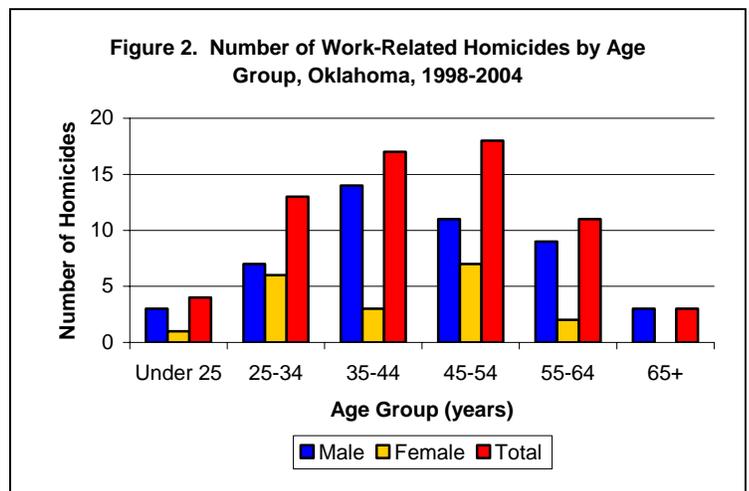
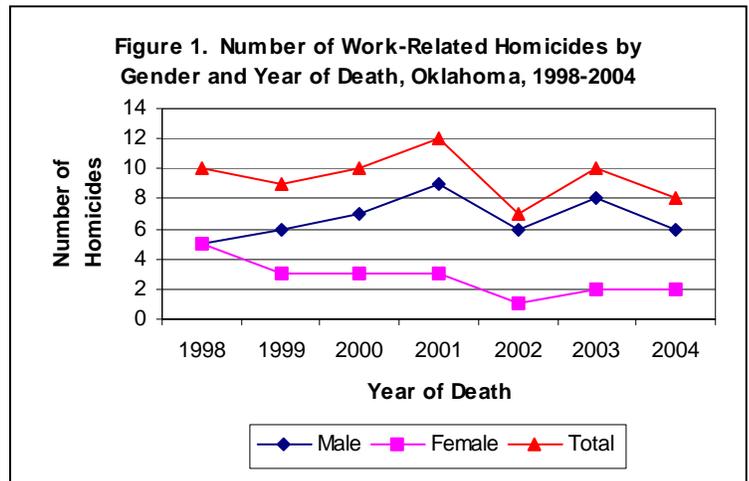
\*The INJURY UPDATE is a report produced by the Injury Prevention Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health. Other issues of the INJURY UPDATE may be obtained from the Injury Prevention Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health, 1000 N.E. 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73117-1299, 405/271-3430 or 1-800-522-0204 (in Oklahoma). INJURY UPDATES and other IPS information are also available at [www.health.state.ok.us/program/injury](http://www.health.state.ok.us/program/injury).

killed in 11 separate incidents. During the seven-year study period, two incidents were double homicides (two workers killed); one incident involved the homicides of a worker and a customer; and 10 incidents involved the work-related homicide, plus additional nonfatal injuries to co-workers and/or bystanders.

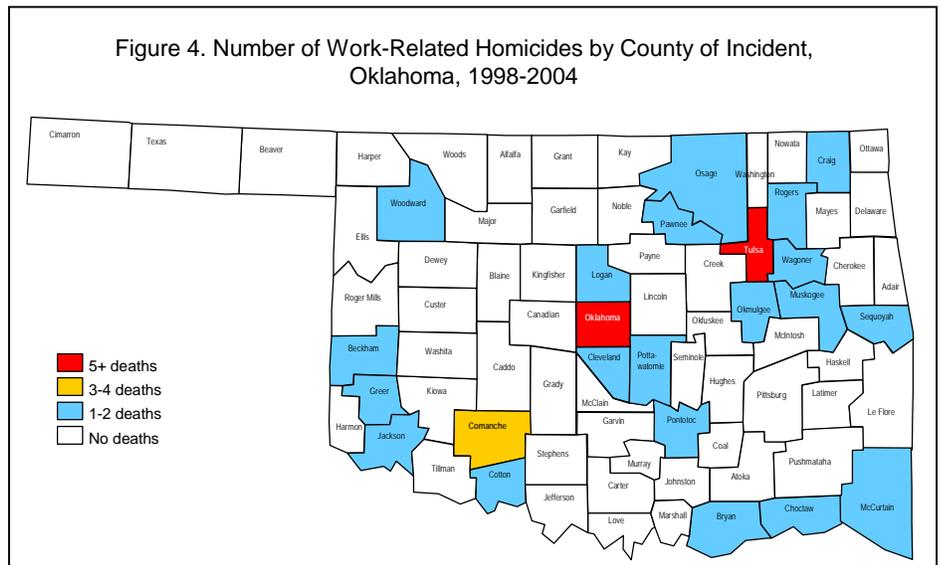
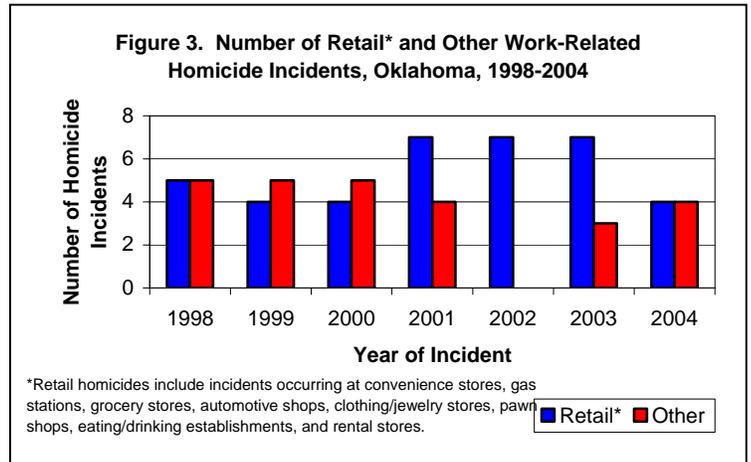
All victims were Oklahoma residents and over 70% were male. Males were over two times more likely to be the victims of work-related homicide than females (0.77 deaths versus 0.37 deaths per 100,000 workers). From 1998 to 2001, the number of male work-related homicides increased 80%, while the number for females decreased 40% (Figure 1). The ages of victims ranged from 18 to 71 years, with a median age of 44 years. Although the number of work-related homicides was highest among 35 to 54 year olds, the highest rates were among 55 to 64 year olds (0.79 deaths per 100,000 workers) and 45 to 54 year olds (0.72 deaths per 100,000 workers). Thirty-seven percent of all female work-related homicides occurred in the 45 to 54 year age group, while 30% of male homicides occurred among 35 to 44 year olds (Figure 2). Two-thirds of homicide victims were white, non-Hispanic; blacks and Asian/Pacific Islanders each comprised 11% of the total, followed by American Indians with 3% (9% unknown/other race).

Of the 64 work-related homicide incidents, 25 (39%) were motivated by robbery, either committed by a stranger or a current or former employee. Eighteen incidents (28%) resulted from an altercation or assault by a co-worker, client, customer, suspect (being pursued by law enforcement), or inmate. Five incidents (8%) were precipitated by personal problems (e.g., domestic disputes or relationship conflicts) and involved current or former spouses, relatives, or friends killing the victims while they worked. Three incidents (5%) were random acts of violence, and for thirteen (20%) incidents, the motive was unknown or could not be determined from available information.

The cause of death for the majority of homicide victims (52 deaths, 79%) was gunshot wounds. Locations of the fatal gunshot wounds were split between head (48%) and chest/trunk/abdomen (48%). Sixty-five percent of gunshot wounds were caused by a handgun, followed by 6% rifles, and 4% shotguns. Ten percent of the incidents involved other firearms, while 15% had an unknown type. Seven victims (11%) had blunt head trauma as the cause of death, while three (5%) were stabbed. Four victims (6%) had other or multiple causes of death.



Nearly 60% of victims were working in retail trades at the time of the incident. The number of incidents occurring at retail establishments increased 75% from 2000 to 2001; in 2002, all work-related homicides occurred at a retail facility (Figure 3). Nearly one-quarter of all work-related homicides from 1998 to 2004 occurred at a convenience store. Sixty percent of murdered convenience store workers were the stores' owners or managers; 40% were employed as clerks. Bar, nightclub, and restaurant workers, including bartenders, cooks, and bouncers, were the second largest group of victims, followed by law enforcement/correctional officers. Work-related homicides also occurred within other occupations involving the exchange of money, including three taxicab drivers and three bank tellers. Two-thirds of the homicides had a known time of occurrence. Of those incidents with a known time, 39% occurred during a normal 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. workday and 36% occurred during the nighttime hours of 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. Of the retail homicides with a known time, almost half occurred



between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. Sixty percent of all work-related homicides from 1998 to 2004 occurred in either Tulsa (33%) or Oklahoma (27%) counties. In total, 77% of work-related homicides occurred in a metropolitan area, while the remaining 15 homicides took place in rural counties (Figure 4).

**CASE BRIEFS**

- A 33-year-old female convenience store manager was found in the store's restroom with five gunshot wounds to the head. The perpetrator charged with the murder had been working the overnight shift and was the person the victim was coming in to relieve. The suspect was supposedly upset that his paycheck was late and was accused of handing out store merchandise to friends because the security camera was not working. He was also accused of another work-related homicide two days later where a 53-year-old gas station owner was killed by four gunshot wounds to the head. Robbery was the motive in both incidents.
- A 54-year-old female bartender was stabbed and beaten by a customer when no other customers or staff was present. The victim was stabbed with a knife that was brought into the bar and was beaten with beer bottles and a baseball bat that were present at the scene. The assailant fled and took no money when two customers drove into the parking lot.
- A 41-year-old nursing home administrator was shot twice in the head by her husband in a back office. The couple had recently separated and there were complaints of domestic abuse on file with police. The victim's husband shot himself after killing his wife. Co-workers did not witness the incident, but did hear gunshots.

- A 36-year-old grocery store employee was fatally injured after he and several other employees chased three suspects after they allegedly left the store without paying for their merchandise. The suspects' activities were witnessed by employees and recorded on the store's surveillance camera. The victim was on a break when he saw the chase and joined the group. The foot chase ended in an alley behind the store where one suspect fired one round, striking the victim in the head.
- A 25-year-old nightclub bouncer was killed by gunshot wounds in the club's parking lot. A suspected car burglar was running away from a nearby parking lot and being chased by someone with a gun. The shooter following the burglary suspect began firing into the crowd outside the nightclub and hit six people. The victim died at the scene.
- A 30-year-old convenience store clerk was shot during a robbery. The store's security cameras captured the suspect entering and pointing a revolver at the clerk. The victim placed money in a bag and handed it to the suspect. The suspect then shot the victim and left with \$30. Two customers witnessed the incident.

## PREVENTION

While there is no universal strategy to prevent violence, a number of risk factors have been identified in previous research that increase a worker's risk of experiencing workplace violence. These factors include:

- Contact with the public or working in community-based settings
- Exchange of money
- Delivery of passengers, goods, or services
- High mobility (e.g., police, taxicab drivers)
- Unstable or volatile clientele (e.g., certain health care or law enforcement settings)
- Working alone
- Working late at night or early in the morning
- Working in high-crime locations
- Guarding valuable property or possessions

Employers have an obligation to promote a safe working environment for their employees. Employers should consider creating, implementing, and evaluating a violence policy and prevention program that is appropriate for their working environment and culture and should communicate with and train employees on violence prevention measures. The development of such a plan would help foster trust and respect and would improve awareness and reporting of threatening or violent behavior. A workplace violence prevention program may include a physical security survey and assessment, procedures for identifying and addressing threatening behavior, identification of accessible outside services, crisis response measures, and designation of an incident response team.

Environmental controls and violence deterrence measures can be made to reduce a worker's chances of becoming a victim. Important factors to consider in safeguarding one's working environment include the layout and design of the premises, lighting, security features (e.g., alarms, cameras, guards, etc.), procedures for handling and storing valuable property and money, employee visibility of individuals entering and exiting the business, personal protective equipment, physical distance between workers and customers, and the number of entrances and exits. Training, education, and a clear statement of zero tolerance of workplace violence need to accompany all prevention modifications. Utilizing a comprehensive, multidimensional approach to violence prevention is one of the most effective ways to reduce workplace violence.

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