

# ADOLESCENT HOMICIDE VICTIMISATION IN JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

Lu-Anne Swart<sup>1</sup>, Mohamed Seedat<sup>1</sup>, Jeanine Vellema<sup>2</sup>

1. University of South Africa, Institute for Social and Health Sciences, South Africa

2. Forensic Pathology Services Southern Cluster Gauteng, South Africa

## INTRODUCTION

In South Africa there has been growing national concern about the high levels of interpersonal violence especially among young people. Several incidents of school homicides in particular made newspaper headlines during 2006 and a national public hearing on "School Based Violence" was also convened by the Human Rights Commission to address the problem. However, incidents of school-associated violent deaths represent only a small proportion of adolescent homicides. The *National Injury Mortality Surveillance System*, which captures approximately 40% of the annual nonnatural deaths in South Africa, reveal that the majority (52%) of nonnatural deaths among youth between the age of 15 and 24 years are due to violence. Unpublished NIMSS data for 2004 shows that of the 8575 violent deaths where age was recorded, young people between the ages of 15 to 24 years accounted for more than a quarter (26.3%) of homicides.

## OBJECTIVES

Given the high rates of homicide among youth South Africans, prevention is a priority. Despite the concern regarding the high levels of violence among South African youth, relatively little scientific research has been devoted to homicides of adolescents in South Africa.

This study seeks to address this scarcity of literature by:

- providing a detailed description of the who, what, where, when and how of adolescent (age 15-19 years) homicides in Johannesburg from 2001 to 2005;
- identifying the geographical distribution of adolescent homicides across neighbourhoods within Johannesburg.

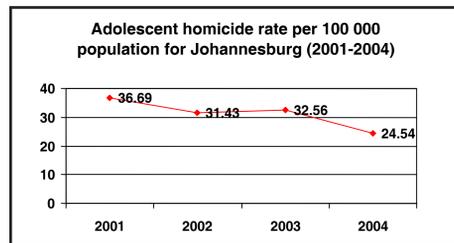
## MATERIALS AND METHOD

The sample of adolescent homicide victims was drawn from the *National Injury Mortality Surveillance System* (NIMSS) from 2001-2005. By law, all injury deaths in South Africa are subject to medico-legal investigation. The NIMSS collates information that arises from these existing investigative procedures at mortuaries and state forensic chemistry laboratories, as a collaborative effort between different research groups and government bodies in South Africa. The NIMSS form is a one-page document typically completed soon after post-mortem. Demographic variables of the deceased, spatial and temporal details of the injury event, the manner and external cause of death, and the involvement of alcohol are recorded.

## RESULTS

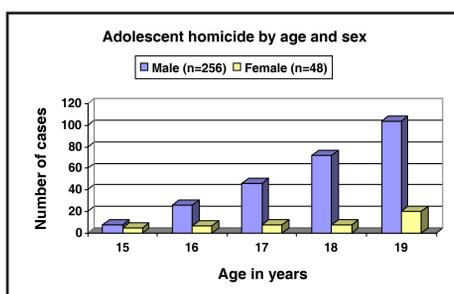
There were 304 adolescent homicide victims in Johannesburg from 2001 to 2005.

The annual homicide rate decreased from 2001 to 2004.



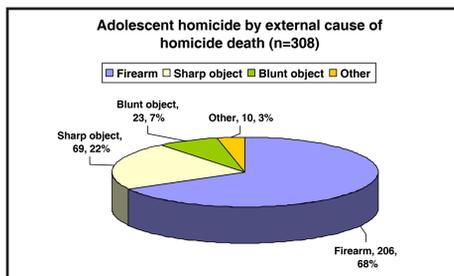
### Age and sex of homicide victims

Victims were mostly aged 18 to 19 years (66.9%) and male (83.1%).



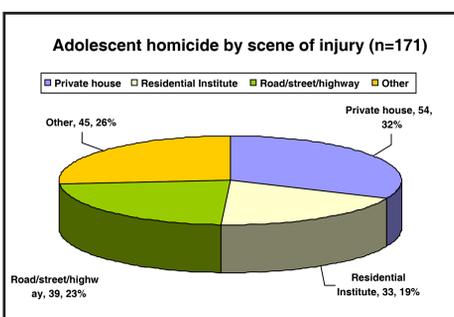
### External cause of homicide deaths

Firearms were used in most (68.5%) of adolescent homicides.



### Scene of adolescent homicides

Scene of injury was recorded for only 171 (55.5%) of adolescent homicides. Of these recorded cases, private houses (31.6%) was the leading scene of injury followed by road/street/highway (22.8%), then residential institute (19.3%).



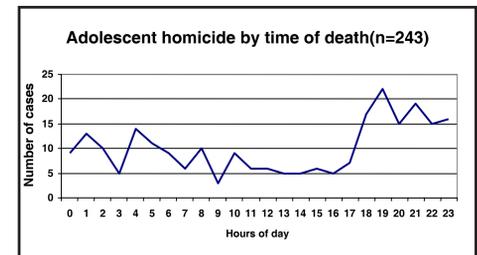
### Day of death

More than half (56.2%) of the adolescent homicides occurred over the weekends, peaking on Saturday (21.9%).



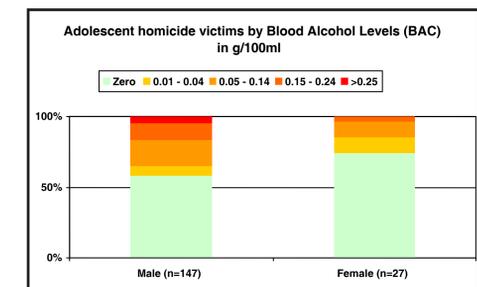
### Time of death

Adolescent homicide deaths peaked in the evenings with 42.8% occurring between 18h00 and 23h00.

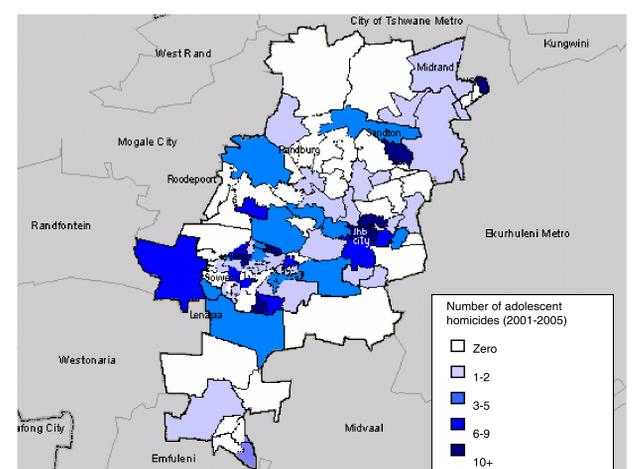


### Alcohol use by victims

Of the 177 adolescent homicide victims tested for alcohol (BACs) 70 (39.5%) tested positive.



### Distribution of adolescent homicides across neighbourhoods within the City of Johannesburg



## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The homicide rate for Johannesburg adolescents is exceedingly high compared to that of other cities worldwide. The findings reveal that prevention strategies must target males, the availability of firearms and alcohol. However, to develop comprehensive prevention strategies further research is required regarding the situational characteristics of adolescent homicide such as the nature of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator as well as the circumstances leading to the homicide event e.g. argument or robbery. Furthermore, the findings also reveal that adolescent homicides are not equally distributed across Johannesburg city. While an effort should be made to target high-risk areas, there is also a need for further research to identify the socio-physical attributes of the various neighbourhoods/areas that may contribute to homicide occurrence.

