

HOMICIDES AMONG CHICAGO FAMILIES: 1870–1930

ROLAND CHILTON*

There are at least two exciting aspects of the files available to the authors of this volume. One is the age and range of the data—the fact that these accounts of Chicago homicides cover a sixty-year period that starts in 1870.¹ In addition, these historical accounts of deaths reported to the Chicago police contain a surprising amount of detail. Because of the amount of detail and number of cases available, we can focus on family homicides—homicides where the victim and offender are related by birth or marriage, by more or less permanent living arrangements, or by some apparent degree of emotional attachment combined with a desire or plan to create a family. One obvious question about these cases concerns the extent to which family homicides have changed over the sixty-one year period for which information is available. Another obvious question concerns the ways in which these earlier family homicides are different from or similar to contemporary accounts of family homicide.

Any comparison of these accounts with contemporary studies will be complicated by the definitions of family homicides that are used. One contemporary approach to the use of very similar information focuses on intimate partner violence or violence by intimates. “Intimates” in these studies have generally referred to people who are husbands, wives, boyfriends, or girlfriends.² Other family members are ignored in this focus on intimates. In part, this approach probably reflects a concern for male violence against women. Although the intimate partner studies include discussions of homicides committed by women, much of the emphasis in them is on the victimization of women. Another reason some researchers have limited the discus-

* Professor of Sociology, University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

¹ See Leigh B. Bienen & Brandon J. Rautinghaus, *Learning from the Past, Living in the Present: Understanding Homicide in Chicago, 1870–1930*, 92 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 437 (forthcoming 2002) (in this issue).

² See LAWRENCE A. GREENFELD ET AL., BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, *VIOLENCE BY INTIMATES* (1998).

sion to "violence by intimates" is that a major source of information on violent crimes other than homicide is the National Crime Victimization Survey, which does not collect information on victims under twelve-years-old.³ Moreover, the only real possibilities for looking at the family relationships of all of the victims and offenders in a set of criminal cases are to use something approximating incident-based data.⁴

The files available for this analysis are essentially incident-based in that information about suspects can be linked to victim information and both types of information can be checked against a set of case summaries. Using them, I was able to combine homicides by spouses, lovers, parents, children, and other family members. The complete list of categories is shown in Table 1. In this family homicide approach, spouses may be "common law" husbands and wives, lovers may be heterosexual or homosexual, parents may be stepparents or grandparents, and children may be stepchildren, foster children, grown children, or sons and daughters-in-law. Former husbands and wives are included as are former boyfriends and girlfriends. Also included are the friends and associates of family members who were or were thought of as romantic or sexual rivals of other family members.

As indicated in the top part of Table 1, were we to focus on violence by "intimates," as the term is sometimes used, there would be only 906 cases of spouses and lovers to examine. By including parents and children and other family members who are reported as homicide victims or defendants, we expand our focus to "family homicide," which adds another 475 cases to the set. This produces a

³ See CALLIE MARIE RENNISON, BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS, INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (2000), available at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/ipv.htm> (abstract only).

⁴ The new incident-based Uniform Crime Reports, currently called NIBRS, will permit the simultaneous examination of age, sex, and relationships of victims and offenders. With a unique identifier for each crime incident, NIBRS makes it possible to link offense information, victim data, and suspect information in ways that allow us to ask about children, stepchildren, grown children, and parents of all kinds. Most importantly, NIBRS data are not limited to homicide incidents. All of the procedures used to look at the homicide data in this study can be used to examine dozens of other offenses when NIBRS data are used. For additional information on the NIBRS program see the FBI's Uniform Crime Report web page, at <http://www.fbi.gov/sitemap.htm>. See Roland Chilton, Nat'l Inst. of Justice, *Can the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) Contribute to Our Understanding of Domestic Violence*, in LETHAL VIOLENCE: PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1945 MEETING OF THE HOMICIDE WORKING GROUP 195 (Marc Riedel & John Boulahanis eds., 1995) (an early attempt to use NIBRS data to study family violence).

total of 1381 cases of homicide involving family members or people who might eventually form families.

Table 1

Relationship of Defendants to Victims by the Victim's Sex and by the Defendant's Sex, when Victims and Defendants had a Past, Current, or Possible Future Family Relationship

By Victim's Sex

Defendant	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
Wife	253	0	0	253
Husband	0	558	0	558
Child	69	18	0	87
Parent*	110	76	29	215
Other Family	138	35	0	173
Lover	41	54	0	95
Triangle	59	12	0	71
Rej. Suitor	4	31	0	35
Accident	41	25	0	66
Total	715	809	29	1553

By Defendant's Sex

Defendant	Male	Female	Unknown	Total
Wife	0	253	0	253
Husband	558	0	0	558
Child	78	9	0	87
Parent*	82	101	32	215
Other Family	163	10	0	173
Lover	72	23	0	95
Triangle	63	8	0	71
Rej. Suitor	33	2	0	35
Accident	49	17	0	66
Total	1098	423	32	1553

* In two cases the victim's sex *and* the defendant's sex were unknown. In all cases when sex was unknown, the victim was a newborn infant killed or left to die by a parent.

If we expand the “lovers” classification to include rejected or jealous suitors, thirty-five more homicides need to be added. Finally, if we include as family-related homicides those committed by or against persons outside the family who are closely involved with a family member, we must look at another seventy-one homicides. Examples of such “triangle” homicides are those where a husband kills his wife’s lover or where his wife’s lover kills him. Any one of the parties in these situations can be a victim or a defendant. With these situations treated as family homicides, there were 1487 homicides among Chicago families from 1870 to 1930.⁵ Were we to include sixty-six “unintentional” and presumably accidental family deaths, this number is 1553. In the analyses that follow, however, these sixty-six deaths and 1731 unintentional non-family deaths, primarily motor vehicle accidents, are not included.

All 1553 family homicides can be viewed in their larger context by noting that they constitute only fourteen percent of all of the homicides in the file. Moreover, they are unlike the vast majority of homicides in the file in some important ways. For example, when family involvement is ignored and the sex of suspects is tallied by the sex of the victim for all cases, we find that ninety percent of the known homicide *defendants* were men or boys and that seventy-nine percent of the *victims* were male. As a consequence, seventy-two percent of

⁵ The frequencies shown in this discussion may not be those shown in other studies of the same basic data. This is because the narratives for each case sometimes list more than one victim and occasionally more than one suspect or defendant. Except for these cases, a unique case number can be used to combine the victim and defendant records and permit an examination of victim-offender relationships. However, in cases with multiple victims or multiple defendants it was sometimes necessary to select the relationship between one of the defendants and the victim or between one of the victims and the defendant. If a mother killed two of her children and herself, I have classified this case as a case of family violence where the victim-defendant relationship was one of violence by a parent against a child.

The sex of the victim is not always given in the brief narratives. When this occurs, it is sometimes because the victim is a newborn infant for whom no name is recorded. In other cases, only the initials of a victim were entered and there is no other indication of the victim’s sex. Since this inability to state the victim’s sex occurs in only eighty records, the loss is not substantial. If we assume that one-half of the newborn infants were male and one-half were female, this part of the lost information would have almost no impact on the distribution of victims and offenders by sex.

The loss of reports of the sex of victims may not be serious, but there is no indication of the sex of the offender for a much larger number of cases. This occurs when the offender is unknown and remains unknown. With gender missing for 80 victims and 2219 offenders, and 33 cases without an indication of either the victim’s or the suspect’s sex, the combined effect is a loss of 2166 cases from the 10,989. This is twenty percent of all cases for the full period.

percent of the cases in which the sex of the victim and offender was available involved a male suspect and a male victim.

However, when the total set of cases is divided into family and non-family homicides and unintentional deaths are excluded, we find sharply contrasting pictures. In fifty percent of the family homicides the victim is female and the suspect is male. This figure is nine percent for non-family homicides. For *family* homicide cases, male suspects with male victims make up only twenty-three percent of all cases, but for *non-family* homicides this figure is eighty-four percent. The details for this comparison of the patterns for non-family homicides and cases involving family members are shown in Table 2. In the top part of the table, the sex of the defendant is tabulated for male and female victims for cases where the sex of both offenders and victims were reported and where there was no indication of a family relationship between victims and offenders. In the bottom part of the table, the same information is shown for cases where both the offender and the victim were family members with different degrees of closeness. Accidental deaths have been excluded from both tabulations.

Table 2

Sex of Suspect by Sex of Victim for Intentional Homicides With and Without Family

No Family Involvement

Suspect's Sex	Victim's Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Male	5159 (84%)	556 (9%)	5715 (93%)
Female	218 (4%)	217 (3%)	435 (7%)
Total	5377 (88%)	773 (12%)	6150 (100%)

Family Homicides

Suspect's Sex	Victim's Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Male	327 (23%)	718 (50%)	1045 (73%)
Female	333 (23%)	50 (4%)	383 (27%)
Total	660 (46%)	768 (54%)	1428 (100%)

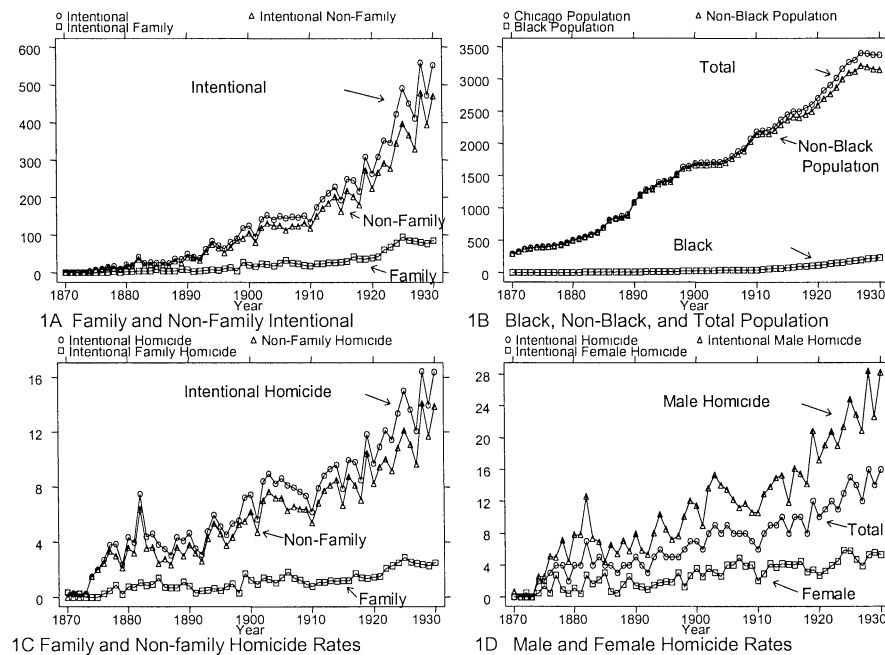
The pattern shown for all 1428 cases in Table 2 is important, but another important fact is that the family homicides shown in Table 2 were not evenly distributed over the sixty-one year period. About 87% of all family homicides occurred after the year 1900. As shown by the bottom line in Figure 1A, family homicides increased from one in 1870 to eighty-four in 1930. Moreover, the sharpest increase in family homicides occurred after 1918 and the increase in non-family homicides was much more pronounced. The top line in Figure 1A shows the annual number of all intentional homicides in Chicago for 1870 to 1930. It is closely followed by the line showing the number of non-family homicides, suggesting that most of the increase in the total number of homicides was influenced by non-family deaths rather than by family murders. Moreover, the increase in the total number of deaths each year, from 1 in 1870 to 553 in 1930, is in part a reflection of the great increase in Chicago's population from less than 300,000 in 1870 to more than 3,300,000 in 1930 (Figure 1B).⁶

⁶ Both the Chicago population and the number of homicides grew rapidly in the last half of the sixty-one year period. Prior to 1890, there were fewer than forty homicides each year and a population estimated at less than one million. By 1925, the city had 553 intentional homicides and a population estimated at 3.3 million residents. The four time periods shown in Table 3 reflect this growth. They were selected by finding the years that divided family homicides into groups of roughly similar size. It took thirty-eight years, 1870–1907, to accumulate 359 homicides and another twelve years, 1908–1919, to accumulate another 396 homicides. The last two sets of years, both five-year periods from 1920–1925 and 1926–1930, had 344 and 408 homicides each. Wesley G. Skogan assembled the population estimates used here while he was a visiting fellow with the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice. The Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research made them available as part of a larger database. See WESLEY G. SKOGAN, INTER-UNIVERSITY CONSORTIUM FOR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RESEARCH, TIME SERIES DATA FOR CHICAGO, 1840–1973 (1976), available at <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu:8080/ICPSR-STUDY/07389.xml> (abstract only).

Nevertheless, homicide *rates* for the period (Figure 1C) show that the increase in homicides outstripped the increase in population. The average of the sixty-one yearly homicide rates for the city was 7 per 100,000 residents. However, the yearly rate increased from less than 1 per 100,000 residents at the beginning to 16.4 per 100,000 residents by 1930.

Two trends stand out in Figures 1A through 1D. One is the relatively stable rate of family homicides from 1897 to 1917. For most of this period, this rate fluctuated around 1.0 per 100,000 residents. The rate increased from 1916 to 1921 but then leveled off at about 2 to 2.5 for the remainder of the 1920's. The non-family homicide rate fluctuated but increased sharply from 1910 to 1930 (Figure 1C).

Figure 1
Chicago Homicides by Family Status and Sex



The other interesting trend in the graphs is the relatively low and stable pattern shown for the rate at which women and girls were reported as homicide victims (Figure 1D). The male

e homicide victimization rate clearly drives the total homicide rate. It increased from about 6 per 100,000 males in 1891 to about twenty-eight in 1930. It was these male homicide victimizations that brought the total homicide victimization rate from 3.5 in 1891 to over 16 in 1930. Any sizable decrease in the overall homicide rate would have required a substantial drop in the male homicide victimization rate. A focus on family violence and its reduction or on the reduction of violence against women, while important in its own right, could not have substantially reduced the overall homicide rate.

I. FAMILY HOMICIDES: HUSBANDS, WIVES, LOVERS, AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS

Within family homicides there is at least one interesting trend. This is the increasing frequency with which wives killed their husbands over the sixty-one year period. The increase in the rate at which females were suspected of homicide, shown in Figure 1D, appears to be the result of an increase in wives killing their husbands rather than an increase in women killing their children or other family members. Table 3 shows a slight increase in wives killing husbands and a slight decrease in husbands killing their wives. For the period from 1870 to 1907, about ten percent of family homicides showed a wife as the offender. By the 1926 to 1930 period, about twenty-four percent of all family homicides listed a wife as the offender. The proportion of all family homicides where a husband was the offender decreased from forty-five percent to thirty-one percent over the same period. However, there was only a three percent drop over the sixty-one year period in the percentage of homicides in which a child killed a parent and no stable trend for cases in which a parent killed a child. There was little consistent change in percentage of other family members reported as suspects and an increase in the percentage of lovers charged with homicide over the sixty-one years.

Table 3

Percentage of All Intentional Family Homicides Attributed to Suspects in Specific Family Categories during Four Different Time Periods

Suspect	Period				Total
	1870– 1907	1908– 1920	1921– 1925	1926– 1930	
Wife	35 (10%)	47 (13%)	72 (21%)	98 (24%)	252 (17%)
Husband	162 (45%)	150 (40%)	117 (34%)	128 (31%)	557 (37%)
Child	26 (7%)	27 (7%)	18 (5%)	16 (4%)	87 (6%)
Parent	41 (11%)	96 (25%)	35 (10%)	43 (11%)	215 (14%)
Other Family	52 (15%)	34 (9%)	46 (14%)	41 (10%)	173 (12%)
Lover/ Suitor	43 (12%)	22 (6%)	56 (16%)	82 (20%)	203 (14%)
Total	359 (100%)	376 (100%)	344 (100%)	408 (100%)	1487 (100%)

As an examination of the total column of Table 3 suggests, over the full sixty-one year period, about fifty-four percent of family homicides involved spouses or former spouses, twenty percent involved parents and children, twelve percent involved family members in other relationships to each other, and about fourteen percent involved lovers, romantic triangles, or rejected suitors. On average, husbands who killed their wives or former wives accounted for about thirty-seven percent of all intentional family homicides. Wives who killed their husbands accounted for about seventeen percent of all family homicides. About fourteen percent of family homicides occurred when parents killed their children, another six percent occurred when children killed their parents. In general, the patterns in Table 3 suggest that by the 1920's women frequently emerged as suspects in family homicides.

The figures in Table 4 suggest that factors associated with race may have had an impact on the number of wives and female lovers who were suspected of killing their husbands or lovers. Of the 663 cases in which a *non-black* spouse or lover was suspected of homi-

cide, seventy-nine percent of the suspects were husbands or male lovers. Of the 349 cases in which a *black* spouse or lover was a suspect, fifty-eight percent of the suspects were male and forty-two percent were female.

Table 4

Number of Intentional Homicide Suspects who were Husbands or Male Lovers in Comparison with the Number who were Wives or Female Lovers.

Suspect	Victim's Race		Total
	Non-Black*	Black	
Husband or Male Lover	524 (79%)	202 (58%)	726 (72%)
Wife or Female Lover	139 (21%)	147 (42%)	286 (28%)
Total	663 (100%)	349 (100%)	1012 (100%)

* Ninety-eight percent of the Non-Black victims in this table were white.

This suggestion is reinforced by the patterns shown in Table 5. When we look at these percentages for four periods of time in this table, it appears that much of the increase in wives killing husbands or lovers is produced by increases in the number of black women who were reported as killing their husbands or lovers. Although Table 5 shows some increase in the number of non-black wives or lovers who kill the men with whom they are involved, the most impressive increases are those shown where the suspects are black wives or lovers who are accused of killing their husbands or lovers.

Table 5

Changes in the Proportion of Intentional Homicide Suspects who are Husbands or Male Lovers or who are Wives or Female Lovers over Four Time Periods, by Race.

Non-Black Victims

Suspect	Period				Total
	1870– 1907	1908– 1920	1921– 1925	1926– 1930	
Husband or Lover	174 (81%)	141 (81%)	98 (73%)	111 (78%)	524 (79%)
Wife or Lover	40 (19%)	32 (19%)	36 (27%)	31 (22%)	139 (21%)
Total	214 (100%)	173 (100%)	134 (100%)	142 (100%)	663 (100%)

Black Victims

Suspect	Period				Total
	1870– 1907	1908– 1920	1921– 1925	1926– 1930	
Husband or Lover	23 (88%)	28 (61%)	66 (59%)	85 (51%)	202 (58%)
Wife or Lover	3 (12%)	18 (39%)	45 (41%)	81 (49%)	147 (42%)
Total	26 (100%)	46 (100%)	111 (100%)	166 (100%)	349 (100%)

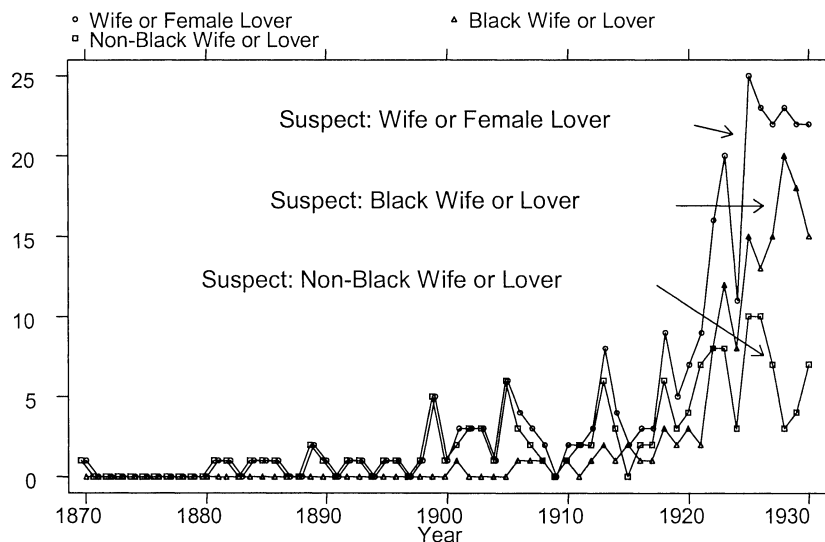
By the 1926–1930 period, almost as many black women as black men were reported as having killed their partners. The increase from twelve percent during 1870–1907 to forty-nine percent during the last half of the 1920's suggests that eighty percent of the increase in situations where wives or lovers killed their husbands was the result of the increase in the number of black women who were suspected of killing their partners.

Figure 2 provides a more detailed indication of this trend. It shows that for most of the sixty-one year period (from 1890–1921)

black women were less likely than non-black women to be suspected of killing a husband or lover. In 1922, this situation was reversed and black wives or lovers were more likely than white wives or lovers to be charged with the death of a husband or lover. In 1925, fifteen black women and ten non-black women were suspected of killing a husband or lover. By 1928, these numbers were twenty black women and three non-black women. Even with a sizable increase in the black population of Chicago, from 110,000 in 1920 to 233,000 in 1930, the increase in the number of black women charged with killing a husband or lover is impressive.

Figure 2

Male Victims of Wife or Female Lover, by Race



The increase in the number of husbands or lovers killed by women is complicated by the romantic or sexual triangles that resulted in the death of at least nineteen husbands. In one of these cases, a wife was reported as an accessory in the death of her husband. However, in eighteen cases, the "other man" killed the husband. There were seven cases where a woman killed "the other woman," four cases where a jealous "other man" killed the woman in the triangle, and one case where a husband killed a woman whom he accused of causing his wife to leave him. Yet in thirty-nine of the

seventy “triangle” cases, a husband was accused of killing, not his wife, but the other man. None of these deaths fits neatly into the wife or female lover category or into the husband or male lover category and are therefore examined separately. They indicate that it would be a mistake to think of triangles only as situations where a jealous husband kills his wife.

II. PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Over the sixty-one year period, 215 parents were suspected of intentionally killing their children, stepchildren, foster children, or sons- or daughters-in-law. Over the same period, a total of eighty-seven children, most of them adults, were recorded as suspects in the death of a parent, stepparent, grandparent, father-in-law, or mother-in-law. This means that when family violence resulted in the death of a parent or child, the offender was more than twice as likely to be a parent as a child. Except for the period 1908–1920, these percentages were fairly stable over the sixty-one year period. The sixty cases of mothers killing their children in the period of 1908–1920 are difficult to explain. They might reflect a shift in policy, which caused the police to raise more questions when a child died during that period, or there might have been an unusual number of abusive mothers in that time period. The circumstances for two-dozen of these homicides were coded as instances of child abuse, but this circumstance was not common in any of the other four time periods. Without these child abuse homicides, the percentages of mothers killing their own children in the period from 1908–1920 would not be out of line with that figure for the other periods.

Table 6
*Fathers and Mothers Charged with Killing a Child, Sons and Daughters
 Charged with Killing a Parent, by Race of the Victim*

Parents as Suspects

Suspect	Victim's Race		Total
	Non-Black	Black	
Father	74 (43%)	6 (67%)	80 (44%)
Mother	100 (57%)	3 (33%)	103 (56%)
Total	174 (100%)	9 (100%)	183 (100%)

Children as Suspects

Suspect	Victim's Race		Total
	Non-Black	Black	
Son	65 (90%)	13 (87%)	726 (72%)
Daughter	7 (10%)	2 (13%)	9 (10%)
Total	72 (100%)	15 (100%)	87 (100%)

The only real variation in the pattern of about 2.5 children killed by a parent for each parent killed by a child appears for black victims. Table 6 shows the pattern. Of the twenty-four *black* victims of parent-child violence, nine children were reported as killed by a parent and fifteen parents were said to be killed by a child. This is almost the reverse of the pattern for *non-black* victims.⁷ Of the 246 *non-black* homicide victims, 174 (71%) were children killed by parents and 72 (29%) were parents killed by children—almost the reverse of

⁷ There were only 60 Asian and 239 other race family homicide victims. With 8579 victims classified as white, the non-black category is 96.6% white. For most practical purposes, non-black can be read as white in these tables.

the pattern for black victims. For this period in Chicago's history, it appears that *black women* were more likely to kill their husbands than *non-black women* but that *black women* were less likely to kill their children than were *non-black women*.

Nevertheless, in this database, when a parent kills a child, the suspect is almost as likely to be the child's mother as the child's father. However, these figures are influenced by a set of mothers who killed very young children and themselves because they saw no way to support the children. Some of them simply turned on the gas and went to bed with their child. One woman jumped from a hospital window with her newborn. Others used knives or razors to kill the child and then themselves. While these situations raised the number of mothers responsible for a child's death, other mothers cruelly abused their children for reasons that are unknown and unrecorded.

When a parent was killed by a child, the offender was usually an adult child and much more likely to be a son than a daughter. Very often the adult child was a son-in-law and the argument that led to the murder grew out of the son-in-law's attempt to have his estranged wife rejoin him. Cases in which a daughter killed a parent were very rare in the family homicide set. While sons were more likely to kill their fathers than their mothers, daughters were only slightly more likely to kill their fathers than their mothers. In any case, family homicides over the sixty-one year period involved husbands and wives much more frequently than parents and children.

III. CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing all family related homicides reported for Chicago from 1870–1930, I now think there are only three broad categories of family violence. The most numerous of these homicides were those involving *spouses and lovers*. Although I have examined cases of spouses and lovers separately, my attempt to separate the category in this way was complicated by the police recorders' use of the concept of "common law marriage." If the police recorder described a victim as a "common law wife," I treated those involved as husband and wife. However, if the police recorder used the term "lover" or "border who had once been a lover," I did not classify those involved as husband and wife.

The police recorders' use of the term "lovers" and even their use of the terms "boyfriend" and "girlfriend" also complicated the analysis. Some of the verbal descriptions of homicides made it hard to know to what extent the relationship had been mutual. In a few cases,

I may have included as lovers men who were actually stalkers or harassers in situations where there never had been a mutual relationship. Nevertheless, for almost all of the cases involving "lovers," it would have been a mistake to treat the suspect as a stranger to the victim.

When the information for spouses and lovers is combined, husbands and male lovers were reported as responsible for about seventy-two percent of the homicides in the spouse and lover category. Wives and female lovers were responsible for the other twenty-eight percent. However, in this database, this relationship changed over time and was different for black victims and suspects. Black wives were more likely to kill their husbands than white wives. The overall proportions of men killing women are more or less consistent with recent reports of similar homicides. In both situations, women killing their partners were *not* rare occurrences.

By including sons-in-law and daughters-in-law as children, I may have complicated the *parents and children* category because some of the controversies between sons-in-law and their fathers-in-law were extensions of husband-wife conflicts. This is especially true where a husband or former husband attempts to get his wife to rejoin him after she has returned to her original family. Not all sons-in-law or fathers-in-law are killed in such circumstances. However, in the other cases, we might argue that it would be more appropriate to include fathers- and sons-in-law as other family relationships. If a quarrel breaks out among in-laws that leads to homicide it probably matters little if the suspect is described as a father-in-law or a brother-in-law.

After reassigning the cases in this way, looking at the category called parents and children produces results that are very similar to those produced when the in-laws are included. In about two-thirds of these parent-child family homicides, the suspect was a parent. In the other one-third, the suspect was a child of the victim. Where a parent was the victim, the child was almost always an adult. These proportions changed little over time, but did vary with the race of the victim. Specifically, black children were rarely reported as the victims of their mothers. White children, on the other hand, were frequently reported as having been killed by their mothers.

Finally, homicides involving *other family members* were in some ways more similar to non-family homicides than any of the family homicide categories. Like non-family homicides, the offenders were likely to be men about ninety-four percent of the time. Deaths were described as the result of a family quarrel for forty-one percent of

these homicides. About twelve percent of the time, the quarrel was over money or property and another twelve percent of the time the circumstances of the death were simply described as domestic violence.

In general, this examination of family homicides in Chicago for the last three decades of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century does not provide much encouragement for those who would reduce the number of family homicides. The dynamics of family life appear to have produced situations where people who knew their victims well resorted to lethal violence. When these family-related homicides involved adults as victims and offenders, as was the case with murders by spouses or lovers, the descriptions in the files suggest that many of the homicides were the result of jealousy or a sense of loss brought on by the end of a relationship. Others appear to have been responses to extended periods of physical abuse. Some are described as self-defense on the part of a woman attacked by her husband. Alcohol use and the availability of guns, knives, and straight razors also appear to play a part in these deaths.

When family-related murders involved parents as offenders, the descriptions suggest that many such homicides were the result of mental illness, emotional stress, or dire economic circumstances. These factors were suggested as possible explanations when a parent was reported as killing one or more of his or her own children and then committing suicide. It appears that once the institutional arrangements creating such pressures were put in place, there was little that could be done to prevent the murders.

To the extent that similar pressures and circumstances exist today, the prospects for significant reductions in family violence seem slim indeed. Some of the pressures that existed prior to 1930 may have been relieved by the creation of economic safety nets in the 1930's. However, some of these protections have been removed in recent years. On the other hand, programs have been introduced to reduce child abuse. Women's shelters have been created and restraining orders have been used with greater frequency. At the same time, there has been no decrease in the availability of guns since 1930 and alcohol use may be more widespread than it was before and during Prohibition. Some have suggested that family violence has decreased with a decrease in domesticity. However, it seems very likely that people will form the same kinds of living arrangements that they have in the past or they will form arrangements that are very similar to them. This suggests that many of the acts that can be described as

family homicides will continue to occur in the future at rates that are not very different from those of the early part of the twentieth century.

