



Original communication

## Time till death study: How soon after “first contact” is a non-biologically related male likely to kill his partners child?

Ken Obenson <sup>a, \*</sup>, Carrie England <sup>b</sup><sup>a</sup> Dept of Laboratory Medicine, Saint John Regional Hospital, Saint John, New Brunswick E2L 4L2, Canada<sup>b</sup> Marion County Coroners Office, 521 W. McCarthy Street, Indianapolis, IN 46225, USA

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## ABSTRACT

Non-biologically related males who are intimate partners of women with young children are the most likely perpetrators of homicidal violence against these children. The primary objective of this study is to determine the usual time interval between first child/unrelated adult male contact and the child's death. The secondary objective is to examine possible predisposing factors. First contact is defined as the time when the child initially interacted or met with the unrelated adult male, whether or not they lived together and for the purposes of this study is based on the length of the mothers relationship with her partner before the child was killed. The coroners office database in Indianapolis, Indiana was examined for records of child homicides from which victim data (age, sex, race and cause of death) was recovered. The associated child protective services (CPS) reports were examined to create a forensic epidemiologic profile including in particular, the length of time the unrelated adult male had known or lived with the child and when the child was killed.

Over a period of 14 years, 79 cases of homicides were recovered in children aged 5 years and younger. Of these, there were 15 cases in which all relevant data was recorded. The time interval from first contact to death ranged from 14 to 240 days with a median of 75 days. Approximately 80% of all victims were killed within 90 days. The victims included 12 males and 3 females with an age range of 2–61 months. The median age was 22 months. There were 10 white, 4 black, and 1 Hispanic victim. Blunt force trauma to the head was the cause of death in 13 of 15 deaths. Forty percent (6/15) had prior CPS contact. Young children are most likely to be killed within 90 days of first unsupervised contact with a non-biologically related male. Most victims were male and blunt force trauma to the head was the leading cause of death.

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### 1. Introduction

There is an increased risk of non-accidental injury inflicted on young children by “social” non-biologic fathers or non-resident males.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the presence of an unrelated adult increases the risk of death by a factor of 50 when compared to children with 2 biological parents and unrelated adult males account for a significant proportion of that number (by up to 25%).<sup>2–4</sup> However while these studies document the danger attending a young child living with an unrelated adult in the home, none have identified a time frame during which these homicides are most likely to occur. In this study, limited to cases in which the unrelated adult is male, the objective is to determine the “time till death” or time interval

between the victims first contact with an unrelated adult male (URAM) and their death. Often this initial contact occurs when the URAM babysits the child either while visiting or after they begin cohabiting with the mother (he moves in with the mother or vice versa).

### 2. Methods

The coroner's office database in Central Indiana was examined for records of child homicides from which victim data (age, sex, race and cause of death) was extracted. The victim age limit was set at 5 years or less. These were then compared against a court database to obtain information on which cases had URAM that had either been charged with or convicted in the death of the child. Associated Child Protection Service (CPS) reports presented as part of the case history were then examined for the following additional data:

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 506 648 6516.

E-mail address: [fineneedle@hotmail.com](mailto:fineneedle@hotmail.com) (K. Obenson).

- History of prior CPS contact
- Criminal charges against the biologic parent
- Age, sex and race of the URAM
- Age, sex and race of the mother
- Length of time the URAM had known or moved in with the child before the child was killed
- Medical history of victim

### 3. Results

Over a 14 year period, 79 cases of child homicide were recovered. Of these, 15 cases recorded victim, URAM and some CPS data. The results are displayed in Tables 1 and 2. Each victim was killed by a single adult male.

#### 3.1. Victim data

Victims include 12 males and 3 females, ranging in age from 2 to 61 months. The median age was 22 months. Of these 15 victims, 10 were white, 4 were black, and 1 was Hispanic. Blunt force head trauma was the cause of death in 13 of 15 cases (see Table 1). None of the victims had a history of cerebral palsy or other chronic disease requiring additional care. In ten cases, the victims also had siblings living in the home although there is no information about whether the siblings were present when the victims were assaulted and killed. In all but one case, the victim was either the youngest or the only child at home.

#### 3.2. Unrelated adult male data

The men aged from 18 to 34 years in age with a median age of 28 years. Of these 15 males, 10 were white, 4 were black, and 1 was Hispanic. All were charged with or convicted of some form of homicide. Coincidentally, the oldest man (34 years) killed the oldest victim (61months). However there was neither correlation between the child's age with that of the unrelated male nor between his age and the time the child was killed. Eleven of the men lived in the same home as the victim while four were visiting. Eight of the men had biological children although none were known to have primary custody. At least six were employed in industries where shift work would have been likely (emergency medical technician, fast food restaurant employee, ware house manager, truck driver, automobile plant employee, and locksmith).

**Table 1**

Forensic epidemiologic data of children killed/alleged to have been killed by mothers boyfriend (unrelated adult male).

Case	Time till death (In days)	Decedent age (months)/Race/Sex	Perpetrator age/Race	Mother age/Race	Status of partner	Cause of death
1	90	14 mo/Black/Male	24/Black	24/Black	Live in-Boyfriend	Blunt force back injury with cardiac laceration
2	80	22 mo/White/Male	30/White	23/White	Live in-Boyfriend	Blunt force head injury
3	35	2 mo/White/Male	28/White	26/White	Live in-Boyfriend	Complications of closed head injuries
4	60	20 mo/White/Male	28/White	20/White	Live in- Boyfriend	Blunt force head injury
5	60	61 mo/White/male	34/White	22/White	Visiting-Boyfriend	Blunt force injuries to head, neck, trunk, and extremities
6	240	24 mo/White/Male	20/White	26/White	Live in- Boyfriend	Blunt force head injury
7	14	50 mo/Black/Male	23/Black	24/Black	Live in- Boyfriend	Blunt force head injuries
8	60	24 mo/White/Male	26/White	26/White	Visiting-Boyfriend	Blunt force head injury
9	28	39 mo/Black/Male	20/Black	20/Biracial	Live in- Boyfriend	Blunt force head injury
10	180	37 mo/White/Female	29/White	27/White	Live in- Boyfriend	Blunt force head injuries
11	90	3 mo/Hispanic/Female	18/Hispanic	16/Hispanic	Live in- Boyfriend	Blunt force head injury
12	60	11 mo/White/Male	28/Black	20/White	Visiting-Boyfriend	Blunt force head injury
13	21	22 mo/White/Male	30/White	26/White	Visiting-Boyfriend	Blunt force head injury
14	150	13 mo/White/Male	29/White	20/White	Live in- Boyfriend	Anoxic brain injury due to asphyxia
15	21	6 mo/White/Male	23/White	unknown	Live in- Boyfriend	Multiple blunt force head injuries

**Table 2**

CPS data of children killed/alleged to have been killed by mother's boyfriend (unrelated adult male).

Case	Time till death (In days)	Prior CPS contact	Mom charged?	Nature of charge
1	90	No	No	N/A
2	80	No	No	N/A
3	35	No	No	N/A
4	60	No	Yes	Neglect
5	60	Yes	Yes	Neglect, Battery, False Reporting
6	240	No	Unknown	N/A
7	14	No	Yes	Neglect of dependent
8	60	Yes	No	N/A
9	28	Yes	Yes	Child Neglect
10	180	Yes	Yes	Felony neglect of a dependent
11	90	Yes	Fled	N/A
12	60	No	No	N/A
13	21	No	No	N/A
14	150	Yes	Yes	Felony neglect of a dependent
15	21	No	No	N/A

### 4. Mother's data

The mothers had custody of the decedents at the time of death and ranged in age from 16 to 30 years with a median age of 22.5 years. Of the fifteen women, 11 were white, 2 were black, 1 was biracial, and 1 was Hispanic. Employment histories were available in 8 mothers as follows: 4 were unemployed, 2 worked in the fast food industry, 1 worked in a bar and the other worked in a supermarket. There was no available history about domestic or child abuse, drug or alcohol problems or mental or physical illness.

#### 4.1. Mortality and legal disposition data (see Table 2)

The time interval from first contact to child death ranged from 14 to 240 days with a mode of 60 days. This occurred in 3 main time frames as follows:

- Thirty percent (5/15) of the victims were killed within 35 days of first contact with the perpetrator.
- Sixty percent (9/15) were killed within 60 days of first contact
- Eighty per cent (12/15) were killed within 90 days.

Forty percent (6/15) of the cases had prior CPS contact and 4 victims had been previously abused. Prior to the homicides, one

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