



Violent Deaths Involving Multiple Victims in California, 2021

Vital statistics data are collected from death certificates for all violent deaths that occur in California. Enhanced surveillance through CaIVDRS is completed for a subset of participating counties by linking vital statistics data to data abstracted from coroner and medical examiner (CME) reports, toxicology reports, and law enforcement (LE) reports. Circumstances that contributed to the deaths that were documented in these reports were included in the surveillance system. This additional data can address the **who, what, where, when, and how** of the deaths to help us try to understand **why** they occurred and prevent similar deaths from occurring in the future.

Within CaIVDRS, violent death events involving more than one victim are defined as two (or more) related deaths that result from injuries occurring within 24 hours of each other. Information on the circumstances surrounding each of the deaths is linked for these events. Multi-victim incidents [e.g., multiple homicides, homicide(s) followed by suicide, multiple suicides] are of particular concern due, in part, to the emotional and economic impact multiple deaths can have on families and communities. Identifying common factors involved in these particularly violent incidents can provide opportunities for prevention of such incidents in the future. This document summarizes selected demographic and circumstance data for violent deaths involving multiple victims for participating CaIVDRS counties in 2021.

Multi-Victim Incidents in California, 2021

In 2021, there were 7,019 violent deaths reported across California. Among the 31 counties that participated in CaIVDRS in 2021, multi-source data was collected and abstracted for 4,093 violent deaths with the majority being single suicide (61%) and single homicide (30%). A total of 174 violent deaths were identified as being involved in a multi-victim incident, representing 4% of surveilled cases. These 174 deaths were the result of 81 incidents. The majority of incidents involved two deaths, with five deaths being the maximum number in a single incident. Of these incidents involving multiple deaths, most were characterized as deaths in a multiple homicide (57%) and single homicide followed by suicide (26%).

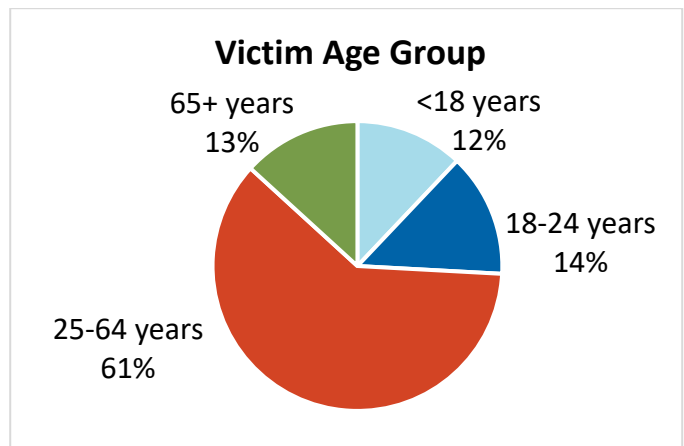
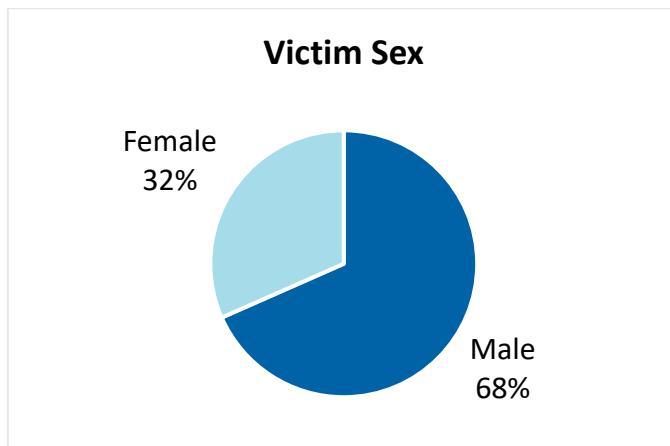
ABOUT CaIVDRS

The [California Violent Death Reporting System \(CaIVDRS\)](#) is housed in the [Injury and Violence Prevention Branch](#) in the California Department of Public Health. CaIVDRS is funded by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) to conduct statewide surveillance on violent deaths that occur in California. Violent deaths include homicide (including law enforcement-involved fatal encounters, where a person is killed or dies as the result of injuries inflicted by a law enforcement officer), suicide, unintentional firearm deaths, and deaths of undetermined intent that meet the CaIVDRS definition. CaIVDRS collects data from multiple sources (i.e., death certificates, medical examiner/coroner reports, and law enforcement reports) in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the circumstances surrounding these deaths. The goal of this system is to promote development of data-driven public health prevention strategies that aim to reduce the number of violent deaths that occur each year.

Breakdown of Multi-Victim Incidents by Type of Incident

Multi-Victim Incident Type	Number of Incidents	%
Multiple homicide incidents [includes Multiple homicide (n=46), Homicide followed by LE-involved fatal encounter (n=3), Mutual homicide/shootout (n=2) and Multiple deaths from LE-involved fatal encounter (n=1)]	52	64%
Single or multiple homicide followed by suicide incidents [includes Single homicide followed by suicide (n=21) and Multiple homicide followed by suicide (n=3)]	24	30%
Other multiple death incidents [includes Multiple suicide (n=4), and Suicide followed by LE-involved fatal encounter (n=1)]	5	6%
Total Multi-Victim Incidents	81	100%

Across Multi-Victim Violent Deaths (n=174)



73%
involved
firearms

16%
of deaths were
gang-related

23%
of deaths were preceded by
an argument or conflict

18%
of victims were also a homicide
suspect in the incident

20%
of deaths were precipitated by
another serious crime

10%
of victims had contact with or
were known to local authorities

This document further describes the victims and circumstances across two distinct incident types that represent 94% of deaths in Multi-Victim Incidents:

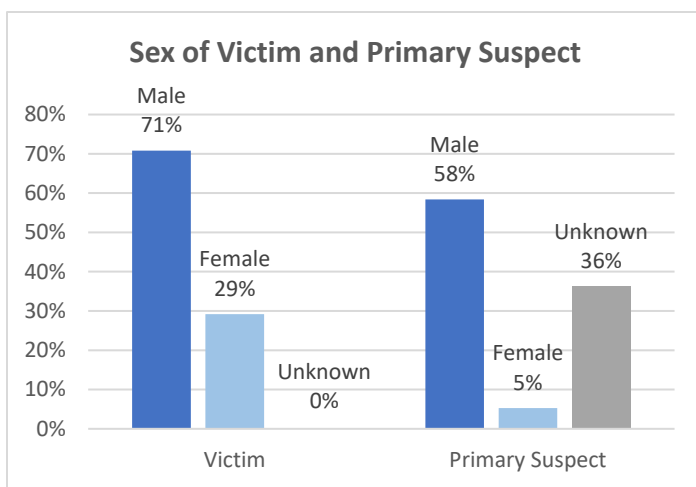
- **Victims in Multiple Homicide Incidents (113 victims across 52 incidents)** – Includes victims of: Multiple homicide, Homicide followed by law enforcement-involved fatal encounter, Mutual homicide/shootout, and Multiple deaths from law enforcement-involved fatal encounter
- **Victims of Homicide(s) followed by Suicide Incidents (51 victims across 24 incidents)** – Includes: Single homicide followed by suicide and Multiple homicide followed by suicide

	Multiple Homicide (113 victims)	Homicide(s) Followed by Suicide (51 victims)
Median Age of Victim (Years)	29	45
Male Victim	71%	65%
Fatal Weapon was Firearm	78%	71%
Argument before Incident	22%	27%
Victim Known to Authorities/Law Enforcement	8%	16%

Characteristics of Multiple Homicides

One quarter of multiple homicide deaths were gang-related and nearly half of the suspects were not identified.

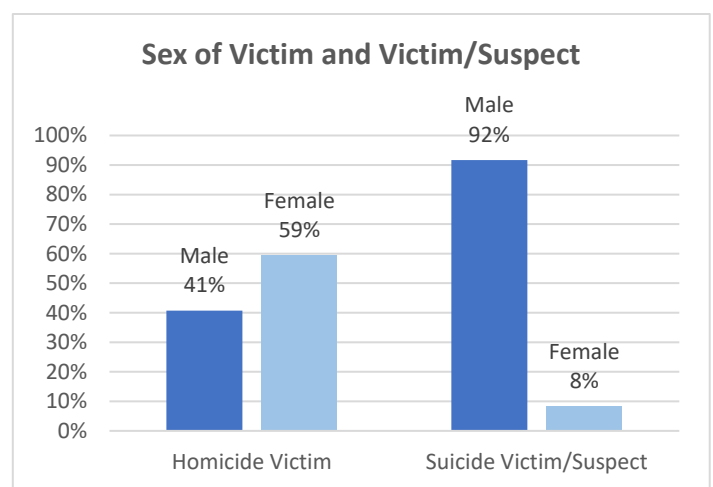
- **71%** of multiple homicide victims were male
- **58%** of the primary suspects were male and **5%** were female
- **59%** of multiple homicide victims did not know the suspect (12%) or the victim to suspect relationship was unknown (48%)
- **25%** of deaths were gang-related
- **15%** of multiple homicides were precipitated by another serious crime
- **11%** of multiple homicide victims used a weapon in the incident



Characteristics of Homicide(s) Followed by Suicide

Many homicides followed by suicides involved interpersonal violence and/or the suspect was known and close to the victim. The suicide victim is also the suspect of the homicide in these incidents.

- **59%** of homicide victims were female
- **41%** of homicide victims died as a result of intimate partner violence (IPV) where the suspect was a current or former intimate partner
- **92%** of suspects/suicide victims were male
- **29%** of suspects/suicide victims were known to local authorities
- **25%** of suspects/suicide victims had a diagnosed mental health problem
- **17%** of suspects/suicide victims had an alcohol or other substance use problem



Opportunities for Prevention of Multi-Victim Incidents

- **Focus on Firearms:** A firearm was the fatal weapon for most multi-victim incident deaths (78%) across incident types. Strategies to facilitate a culture of firearm safety (e.g., safe and secure gun storage, training and licensing for owners, engagement with responsible gun dealers and owners in identifying solutions to violence) or those that may limit access to firearms in certain cases (e.g., youth, individuals at risk of harming themselves or others) may help to prevent these deaths in the future.
- **Focus on Shared Risk Factors:** It may be beneficial to address risk factors that are relevant to the different types of incidents so that prevention efforts can be focused on individuals and groups who are most at risk of violent death. In multiple homicides, most victims and primary suspects were male (71% and 58%, respectively). Females were more likely to be a victim in homicide(s) followed by suicide with 41% of these incidents a result of IPV. These could be priority populations for prevention strategies. Examples include:
 - **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV):** Implement strategies to prevent IPV and increase awareness for the need to promote healthy relationships. Increase awareness of and access to resources for IPV victims.
 - **Gang-Related Violence:** Often associated with at-risk youth and younger victims, often male, prevention strategies should identify various points of intervention in the life course of youth and young adults at risk of exposure to gang-related violence.

Resources

[CDC: Firearm Violence Prevention](#)

[National Domestic Violence Hotline](#)

[National Gang Center](#)

[988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988](#)

[CDC: Intimate Partner Violence Prevention](#)

[Parent's Quick Reference Card: Recognizing and Preventing Gang Involvement](#)

[Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741](#)

[Office on Women's Health: Relationships and Safety](#)

[Gang Involvement Prevention](#)

Notes about CalVDRS data

- 31 counties participated in CalVDRS data collection for 2021 deaths: Amador, Butte, Colusa, Fresno, Glenn, Humboldt, Imperial, Kings, Lake, Lassen, Los Angeles, Mendocino, Merced, Modoc, Mono, Orange, Placer, Sacramento, San Benito, San Diego, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Siskiyou, Solano, Sonoma, Tehama, Ventura, and Yolo Counties.
- These CalVDRS counties represent 62% of the violent deaths that occurred in 2021 in California and cover a mix of both urban and rural counties across the state.
- Circumstances are not mutually exclusive, and more than one can be indicated for each death.

Data Sources

- California Violent Death Reporting System (CalVDRS), Injury and Violence Prevention Branch, Center for Healthy Communities, California Department of Public Health (CDPH), 2021
- Vital Statistics data: California Comprehensive Master Death File (CCMDF), CDPH, 2021.

CalVDRS is supported by a grant funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC). CDC Grant Number (5 NU17CE010129).

Brief released April 2024.

For more information contact the CalVDRS team at calvdrs@cdph.ca.gov.

Scan to provide feedback!



<https://tinyurl.com/CalVDRSfeedback>