

Female Murder Victims and Victim-Offender Relationship, 2021

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The percentage of females murdered by an intimate partner was five times higher than for males

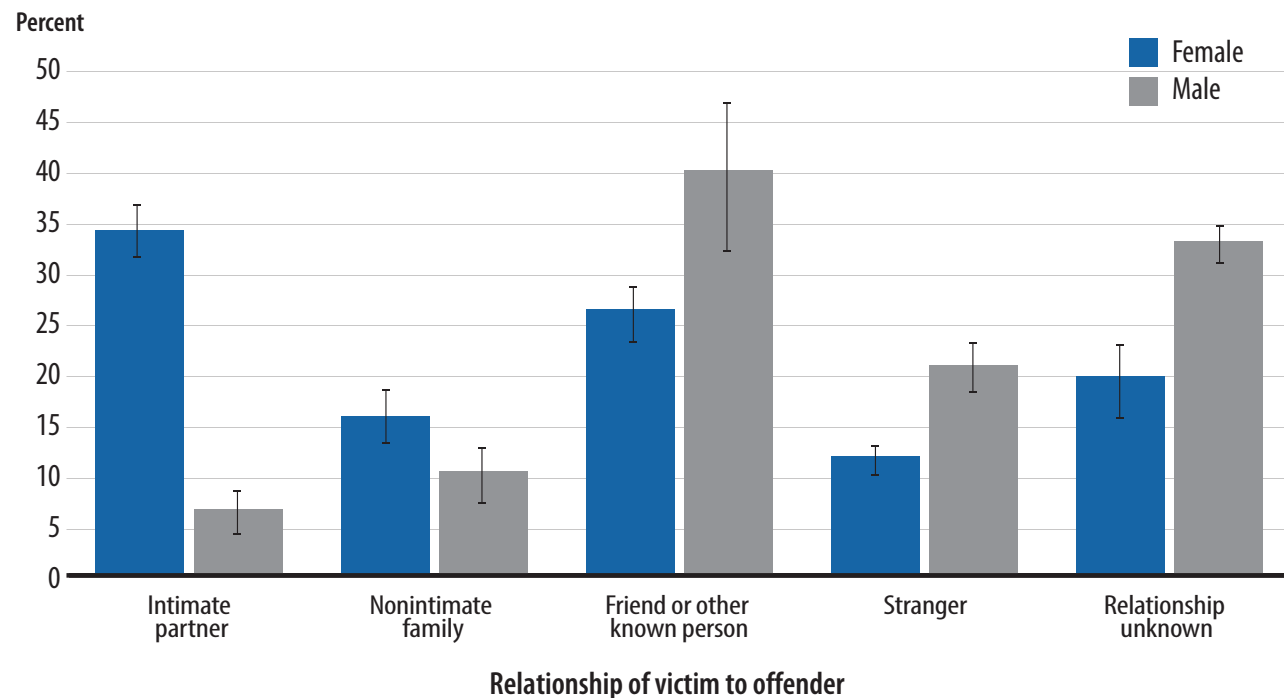
Of the estimated 4,970 female victims of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter in 2021, data reported by law enforcement agencies indicate that one-third (34%) were killed by an intimate partner ([figure 1](#)). By comparison, about 6% of the 17,970 males murdered that year were victims of intimate partner homicide.

Overall, three-quarters (76%) of female murders and more than half (56%) of male murders were perpetrated by someone known to the victim. About 16% of female murder victims were killed by a nonintimate family member—parent, grandparent, sibling, in-law, and other family member—compared to 10% of male murder victims.

A larger percentage of males (21%) than females (12%) were murdered by a stranger. For 1 out of every 3 male murder victims and 1 out of every 5 female murder victims, the relationship between the victim and the offender was unknown.

FIGURE 1

Percent of murder victims, by victim sex and relationship of victim to alleged offender, 2021



Note: Bars indicate the confidence interval around each point estimate. For example, the estimated percentage of female murders perpetrated by an intimate partner in 2021 was 34%, plus or minus 1.8%. Findings are based on national estimates derived from the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). See [Estimation Procedures for Crimes in the United States Based on NIBRS Data](#) (NCJ 305108, BJS/FBI, August 2022) for more information.

Source: National crime estimates based on data from the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System, 2021.

Methodology

About the data

The [National Incident-Based Reporting System](#) (NIBRS) is a data collection system designed and maintained by the FBI that compiles data on all crimes recorded by participating state and local law enforcement agencies. NIBRS captures extensive information on each incident known to law enforcement. The NIBRS database collects detailed information on 52 different offenses that can occur within a crime incident and collects arrest-only information for an additional 10 offenses.¹ In 2021, national estimates of crime were based on data received from about 11,790 of the 18,800 law enforcement agencies in the United States, representing approximately 65% of the U.S. population. (See BJS's [National Incident-Based Reporting System](#) page and the FBI's [Crime Data Explorer](#) for more information.)

Definitions

Murder

Murder is composed of the two homicide categories: murder and nonnegligent manslaughter. The FBI defines murder and nonnegligent manslaughter as “The willful (nonnegligent) killing of one human being by another.”² Attempted murders, accidental deaths, suicides, and traffic fatalities are not coded as murders in NIBRS. In addition, felony murder or situations where a victim dies of another cause (such as a heart attack) because of a crime being committed against them should not be classified as a murder.

Relationship of victim to alleged offender

The relationship of the victim to the alleged offender(s) is based on the NIBRS *Relationship(s) of Victim to Offender(s)* data element, which includes 27 distinct relationship types. For this analysis, the relationship types were aggregated into six categories, detailed below:

- Intimate partner—includes Victim Was Boyfriend/Girlfriend, Victim Was Common-Law Spouse, Victim Was Spouse, Victim Was Ex-Relationship (Ex-Boyfriend/Girlfriend), and Victim Was Ex-Spouse
- Nonintimate family—includes Victim Was Child, Victim Was Grandchild, Victim Was Grandparent, Victim Was In-law, Victim Was Other Family Member, Victim Was Parent, Victim Was Sibling, Victim Was Stepchild, Victim Was Stepparent, and Victim Was Stepsibling
- Friend or other known person—includes Victim Was Acquaintance, Victim Was Babysitter, Victim Was Child of Boyfriend or Girlfriend, Victim Was Employee, Victim Was Employer, Victim Was Friend, Victim Was Neighbor, and Victim Was Otherwise Known
- Stranger—includes Victim Was Stranger
- Victim was offender—includes Victim Was Offender; this relationship type is used to denote when a participant in a crime incident was both a victim and an offender, such as domestic disputes or bar fights where two or more persons were identified as participating
- Unknown relationship—includes Relationship Unknown

The relationship category Victim Was Offender is not included in this report because less than 2% of murders and nonnegligent manslaughters in 2021 were estimated to include this type of relationship.

Calculating national estimates of crime based on NIBRS

Beginning with the 2021 data year, national estimates of crime known to law enforcement were based solely on NIBRS data. To calculate national estimates, BJS and the FBI partnered with RTI International to establish a new set of statistical procedures that would incorporate the NIBRS data structure and account for agencies that did not report data to the system. In October 2022, the FBI published the first set of national estimates derived from the new methodology; the data tables are available [here](#). For information about the development of the estimation procedures, including links to technical reports documenting the process, see the BJS [NIBRS Estimation Project](#).

¹Federal agencies submitting data to NIBRS may report an additional 19 offense types and 3 arrest-only offense types that are exclusive to federal crime incidents.

²NIBRS User Manual, p. 29, viewable at <https://le.fbi.gov/informational-tools/ucr/ucr-technical-specifications-user-manuals-and-data-tools>.



The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice is the principal federal agency responsible for measuring crime, criminal victimization, criminal offenders, victims of crime, correlates of crime, and the operation of criminal and civil justice systems at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels. BJS collects, analyzes, and disseminates reliable statistics on crime and justice systems in the United States, supports improvements to state and local criminal justice information systems, and participates with national and international organizations to develop and recommend national standards for justice statistics. Alexis R. Piquero, PhD, is the director.

This report was written by Erica L. Smith. Andrea M. Gardner verified the report.

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