

MURDERS IN NEW YORK

I don't usually write about statistics because they usually are boring. This column is an exception. It is all about statistics I got from an article in the N.Y. Times and just had to share them with you. The article was based on police data of murders that took place in New York over the last three years and they are far from boring – in fact, they are surprising, probably relevant to anyone who lives in a large American city and some of them are surprising enough to provoke the, “Really? Are you sure? I didn't know that!” reaction.

Here is an example of the latter: women are more than twice as likely to murder a husband or current lover than men, but once the romance has cooled, men are the only ones who murder their exes. And, by the way, males overwhelmingly use guns while women are divided 50/50 between guns and knives.

The favorite murder day is Saturday. Most homicides take place outdoors and the favorite time is 1 to 2 a.m. The oldest killer was 88; he murdered his wife. The youngest was 9; she stabbed her friend. The oldest victim was 91; she died during a robbery.

There were 1662 murders in New York during the last 3 years with 520 of them in 2005; the lowest yearly number since the early 1960s. About 70% of the murders are closed out annually – the national rate is about 62%.

Men and boys are responsible for 93% of the murders; they use guns about 2/3 of the times and most of their victims are also male and the killer and the victim know one another. If you stop and think about it – just measly 7% of the murderers are women! Should the feminists demand equality? Is this yet more proof of inequality and oppression of women? Or are women somehow different from men? Heresy!

Children represent a small but heartbreaking percentage of the victims. Twenty-one infants and thirty-two children aged 1 to 10 were murdered, most by their parents.

In 7 out of 10 killings the victim and the murderer were of the same race and 90% of the killers had criminal records, as did about 50% of the victims. I suggest

that this is something to keep in mind when we read about the 150,000 criminals that were recently released by the Los Angeles County sheriff after serving 10% of their sentence for lack of prison space and who have already committed 16,000 serious crimes, including 16 murders.

In a nod to political correctness, the N.Y. Times hides this interesting statistic in one of the last paragraphs, mixed in with material that has no relevance to it: whites and Asians seldom murder and are seldom murdered. They represent 75 or fewer victims each year. The Times arbitrarily creates a novel Asian/white category, does not say how many Asians *and* whites are murderers (I'd guess not many) or how many murderers are white *or* Asian. Even if we should assume that there are as many Asian and white murderers as victims and deduct 75 from the 2005 total of 540, we are left with about 465 that just had to be black, Latino or maybe Pacific Islanders, Native Americans or extra-terrestrials. But I suppose that it would be too racist for the Times to admit this.

While the majority of murders are committed by people who know one another, the "stranger" murders have greatly increased. Fifty years ago, strangers committed 14% of murders – today this rate is close to 25%!

Most of the "stranger" murders are the result of an unplanned dispute. A man was murdered after offering a ride to a group of stranded people; a serial killer murdered, but didn't rob, four shopkeepers whom he thought to be Middle Easterners; a customer stabbed to death a KFC cashier after complaining about being given too small a portion of wedged potatoes.

Both the police and criminologists agree that the risk of being murdered is slight for an average city dweller.

"If the average New Yorker is concerned about being murdered in a random crime, the odds of that happening are really remote," said Michael J. Farrell, NYPD Deputy Commissioner. "If you are living apart from a life of crime, your risk is negligible."

Andrew Karmen, professor of sociology at John Jay College agrees. "Victims and offenders are pulled from the same background. Very often young victims have young killers."

Professor Karmen's views on causes of murders are somewhat more controversial.

"The problem of crime and violence is rooted in neighborhood conditions – high rates of poverty, family disruption, failing schools, lack of recreational opportunities, active recruitment by street gangs, drug markets. People who are forced to reside under those conditions are at a greater risk of getting caught up in violence, as victims or as perpetrators," Karmen says.

I do not agree with the professor's analysis that blames an evil – or at least indifferent – society, disregards personal responsibility by the "people who are forced to reside under those conditions" and equates victims and perpetrators. The NYPD Deputy Commissioner is somewhat more diplomatic in his disagreement: "Crime is concentrated," Mr. Farrell said. "Who knows why? We're looking at what we can affect."