



National Coalition for the Homeless

2201 P. St. NW

Washington, DC 20037

Phone: (202) 462-4822 • Fax: (202) 462-4823

Email: info@nationalhomeless.org • Web page: <http://www.nationalhomeless.org>

Hate Crimes and Violence Against People Experiencing Homelessness

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History of Violence

Over the past several years, advocates and homeless shelter workers from around the country have received news reports of men, women and even children being harassed, kicked, set on fire, beaten to death, and even decapitated. From 1999 through 2004 alone, there have been 386 acts of violence resulting in 156 murders of people experiencing homelessness by housed people, 230 victims of non-lethal violence in 140 cities from 39 states and Puerto Rico.

In response to this barrage of information, NCH, along with its Civil Rights Work Group, a nationwide network of civil rights and homeless advocates, began compiling documentation of this serious problem. NCH has taken articles and news reports and compiled them into an annual report. The continual size of reports of hate crimes and violence against people experiencing homelessness has led the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) to publish its sixth consecutive report, *Hate, Violence, and Death on Main Street USA: A Report on Hate Crimes and Violent Acts Against People Experiencing Homelessness in 2004*. This report is a six-year study as well as a detailed analysis of 2004. These reports are available on the NCH website at www.nationalhomeless.org.

What is a Hate Crime?

The term “hate crime” generally conjures up images of cross burnings and lynchings, swastikas on Jewish synagogues, and horrific murders of gays and lesbians. In 1968, the U.S. Congress defined a hate crime as a crime in which the defendant intentionally selects a victim, or in the case of a property crime, the property that is the object of the crime, because of their race, color or national origin (Title 18 U.S.C Section 245). The first federal law to combat hate crimes, 18 USC Section 245, passed in 1968; it mandated that the government must prove both that the crime occurred because of a victim’s membership in a designated group and because the victim was engaged in certain specified federally-protected activities -- such as serving on a jury, voting, or attending public school.¹

Federal bias crime laws enacted subsequently have provided additional coverage. The Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990 (HCSA) mandates the Justice Department to collect data from law enforcement agencies about crimes that “manifest evidence of prejudice based upon race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.”² The Hate Crimes Sentencing Enhancement Act, enacted as a section of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, defines hate crimes as “a crime in which the defendant intentionally selects a victim, or in the case of a property crime, the property that is the object of the crime, because of the actual or perceived race, color, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation of any person.” This measure only applies to attacks and vandalism that occur in national parks and on federal property.³

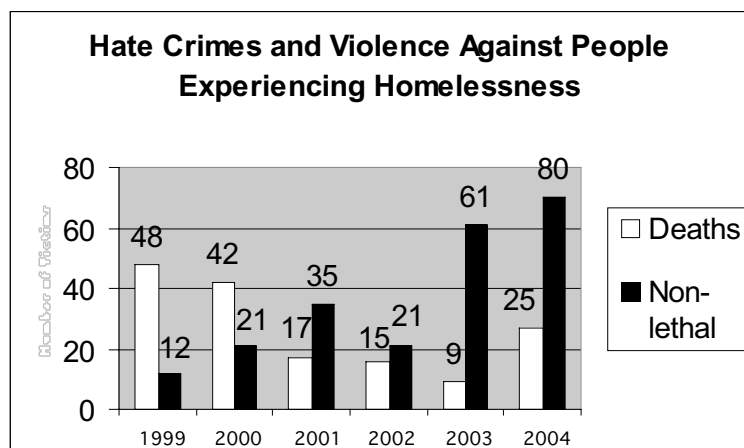
¹ Source: Anti-Defamation League, http://www.adl.org/legislative_action/hatecrimes_briefing.html

² Source: Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, www.civilrights.org

³ Source: Anti-Defamation League, http://www.adl.org/legislative_action/hatecrimes_briefing.html

Who Commits Hate Crimes and Violence Against People who are Homeless?

Most hate crimes / violent acts are committed not by organized hate groups, but by individual citizens who harbor a strong resentment against a certain group of people. Some are “mission offenders,” who believe they are on a mission to cleanse the world of a particular evil. Others are “scapegoat offenders,” who violently act out their resentment toward the perceived growing economic power of a particular racial or ethnic group. Still others are “thrill seekers,” those who take advantage of a vulnerable and disadvantaged group in order to satisfy their own pleasures. Thrill seekers, primarily in their teens, are the most common perpetrators of violence against people who are homeless.

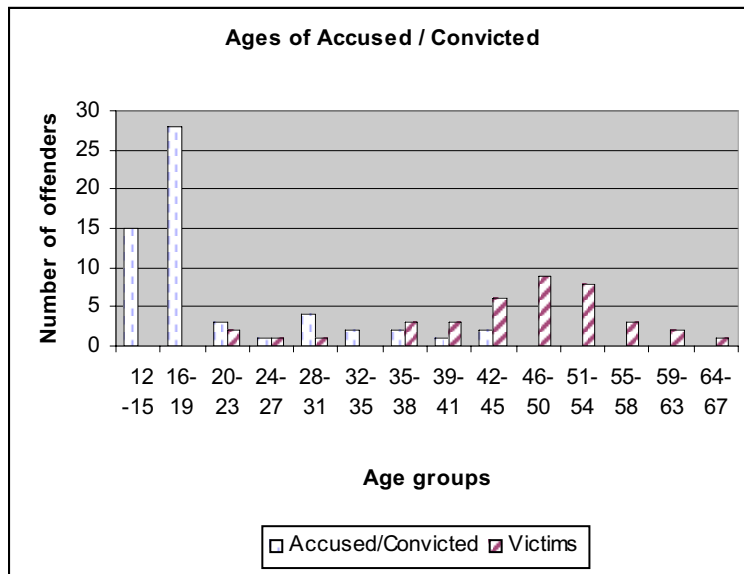


Six Years Analysis (1999—2004) Hate Crimes / Violence Statistics

Total number of violent acts over 6 years: 386
Total number of deaths over 6 years: 156; 67% increase since 2002
Total number of non-lethal attacks over 6 years: 230; 281% increase since 2002
Number of cities where crimes occurred over 6 years: 140
Number of states where crimes occurred over 6 years: 39 plus Puerto Rico
Age ranges of the accused/convicted: from 11 to 65 years of age
Age ranges of the victims: from 4 months old to 74 years of age
Gender of victims: Male: 296 Female: 44

2004 Hate Crimes / Violence Statistics

Total number of violent acts: 105
Total number of deaths: 25
Total number of victims who suffered from non-lethal violence: 80
Number of cities where crimes occurred: 36
Number of states: 22 plus Puerto Rico
Age ranges of the accused/convicted: from 12 to 45 years of age;
45 (two), 44, 42, 39, 38, 35, 34, 33, 32, 30, 29, 28 (two), 27, 25, 23, 22 (two), 20, 19 (six), 18 (six), 17 (twelve), 16 (six), 15 (nine), 14 (five), 12
Age ranges of the victims: from 20 to 65 years of age;
65, 63, 61, 58, 57, 56, 54, 53, 52 (three), 51 (three), 50 (five), 49, 48 (three), 45, 44, 43 (two), 42 (two), 39 (three), 38 (two), 37, 30, 25, 21, 20,
Gender of victims: Male: 67 Female: 10



Examples of Hate Crimes and Violence Against People Experiencing Homelessness

**In October of 2004, three Milwaukee teens murdered a homeless man at his forest campsite. The teens hit 49-year-old Rex Baum, with rocks, a flashlight, and a pipe, before smearing feces on his face and covering his body with leaves and plastic. According to the criminal report, one of the boys “hit the victim one last time to see if he would make a sound like in Grand Theft Auto,” and then cut him several times with a knife to make sure he was dead.

**In August, Curtis Gordon Adams, 33, beat and stabbed a disabled homeless man to death, and then licked the blood from his fingers on a Denver sidewalk.

**In June, two New York City teens, kicked, punched, and finally bludgeoned 51-year-old William Pearson to death in a churchyard. Pearson crawled to the church steps before finally dying of a fractured skull. “His head was a bloody mess,” one police officer noted.

What Can Be Done to End Hate Crimes and Violence Against People who are Homeless?

1. A **public statement** by the U.S. Department of Justice acknowledging that hate crimes and/or violence against people experiencing homelessness is a serious national trend.

1. The Justice Department would **issue guidelines** for local police on how to investigate and work with people experiencing homelessness based on recommendations from the National Coalition for the Homeless. The Justice Department would recommend improvements to state law on how to better protect against violence directed against people experiencing homelessness, including tougher penalties.

3. A **database** to be maintained by the U.S. Department of Justice, in cooperation with the National Coalition for the Homeless, to track hate crimes and/or violence against people who are experiencing homelessness.

4. **Inclusion of housing status** in the pending state and federal hate crimes legislation. Pending federal bill is the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2005 (H.R. 2662 in the U.S. House of Representatives; S.1145 in the U.S. Senate--109th Congress).

5. **Sensitivity/Awareness training** at police academies and departments nationwide for trainees and police officers on how to deal effectively and humanely with people experiencing homelessness in their communities.

6. A **U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) study** into the nature and scope of hate crimes and/or violent acts and crimes that occur against people experiencing homelessness. This proposed study would address the following:

- Causes of hate crimes/violence.
- Circumstances that contribute to or were responsible for the perpetrators' behavior.
- Beliefs held by the perpetrators of these crimes and how their beliefs have changed since conviction.
- Thoughts and advice from the perpetrators to others who are considering hate crimes/violence against the homeless population.
- Community education, prevention and law enforcement strategies.

Resources

No More Homeless Deaths! Hate Crimes: A Report Documenting Violence Against Men and Women Homeless in the U.S. 1999.

A Report of Hate Crimes and Violence Against People Who Are Homeless in the United States in 2000.

Hate: A report of Hate Crimes and Violence Against People Who Are Homeless in the United States in 2001.

Hate, Violence, and Death on Main Street USA: A Report on Hate Crimes and Violent Acts Against People Experiencing Homelessness from 1999 – 2002.

Hate, Violence, and Death on Main Street USA: A Report on Hate Crimes and Violence Against People Experiencing Homelessness in 2003

Hate, Violence, and Death on Main Street USA: A Report on Hate Crimes and Violent Acts Against People Experiencing Homelessness in 2004.

These entire reports are available through NCH's website (www.nationalhomeless.org) at no charge or \$11.50 each for a hard copy (includes shipping/handling) from NCH.