









**Criminal history**

A little over half of the defendants in family murders, but over three-quarters of defendants in nonfamily murders, had been arrested in the past (table 7). Defendants were more likely than their victims to have a criminal history. Nevertheless, 44% of murder victims (51% nonfamily and 19% family) had a prior history of arrest or conviction.

Whether or not the victim had a criminal history, the killer had such a history in most cases (table 8). The likelihood of the killer's having a prior record was greater when the victim also had a record. Victims with a prior criminal record accounted for 44% of all victims; 83% of these victims were killed by someone with a prior criminal history. (See Methodology, page 9, for calculation of the percentage of defendants with a prior record.) For family murder victims the percentages were lower: 21% had a criminal record and 69% of these victims were killed by someone with a prior record. Among the murderers of family victims without a criminal record, 42% had such a history.

**Age of victim and victim-assailant family relationship**

When a person under age 12 is murdered, a family member is the best suspect, according to survey results; family members killed 63% of the child murder victims.

**Table 7. Criminal history of murder victims and defendants, by their family relationship, 1988**

Relationship of victim to assailant	Percent with any prior arrest or conviction
<b>Victims</b>	
All	43.7%
Nonfamily	51.2
Family	19.3
Spouse	34.5
Offspring	2.1
Parent	11.7
Sibling	27.4
<b>Defendants</b>	
All	73.8%
Nonfamily	76.7
Family	56.0
Spouse	51.4
Offspring	45.4
Parent	67.2
Sibling	71.0

Note: See table 1 note for definitions of the family relationships.

**Table 8. Criminal history of murder victims and offenders within the same case, by their family relationship, 1988**

Relationship victim to assailant	Percent of victims and defendants with a criminal history			
	Neither	Both	Victim only	Defendant only
<b>Victims</b>				
All	23.2%	38.9%	7.5%	32.2%
Nonfamily	16.9	43.4	7.9	31.8
Family	45.7	14.3	6.4	33.8
<b>Defendants</b>				
All	23.1%	38.2%	8.8%	29.9%
Nonfamily	16.3	43.9	9.2	30.5
Family	50.5	15.0	7.1	27.3

Note: See table 1 note for definitions of the family relationships. Percentages of victims or defendants with a criminal history differ slightly from table 7 because of missing data.

Age of victim	Percent of murder victims with a family relationship to assailant	
	All	to assailant
All	100%	16%
Under 12	5	63
12-19	11	6
20-29	35	9
30-59	42	18
60 or older	7	27

However, a family member is an unlikely suspect in murders of persons in their teens. Among victims age 20 or older, the likelihood that a family member was the killer increased as the victim's age increased.

A family member was involved in the murder of 27% of the murder victims age 60 or older. Among all murders of persons in the oldest group, offspring as the killer accounted for 11%. Among murders of family members age 60 or older, the most frequent assailant category was not the spouse, as for younger adult victims, but the victim's offspring. The assailant was an offspring in 42% of family member victims age 60 or older and a spouse in 24%. The most frequent family member category varied by the victim's age:

Age of family victim	If family murder victim, most likely assailant	Percent of family murder victims with most likely assailant
All	Spouse	40%
Under 12	Parent	91
12-19	Parent	59
20-29	Spouse	55
30-59	Spouse	57
60 or older	Offspring	42

**Murder weapons used against young children and elderly parents**

When parents killed their offspring under age 12, they rarely used a firearm or knife. Firearms or knives were responsible for the deaths of 7% of offspring victims under 12. When sons and daughters killed their parents age 60 or older, in most cases they did not use a firearm or knife. Firearms or knives accounted for 44% of family murder victims age 60 or older.

**Victims who were children under age 12**

A parent was the assailant in the majority (57%) of family murders involving victims under 12.

For all murder victims under age 12, death was often preceded by child abuse. In 57% of cases the assailant had abused the murder victim under age 12. Among offspring murder victims who were under age 12, before their death 79% had suffered abused by the assailant.

Rape or sexual assault preceded the death of 6% of murder victims under age 12. These crimes occurred less often when the assailant was a parent, accounting for 1% of offspring murder victims under age 12.

Circumstance	Among Offspring victims			All victims under 12
	all victims	Any age	Under age 12	
Included felony sexual assault	2%	1%	1%	6%
Assailant had abused the victim	3%	62%	79%	57%















