Creating a more complete picture of violent deaths

In 2010, over 16,250 people were victims of homicide and over 38,360 took their own life, according to the CDC. Valuable information about these and other violent deaths is collected by many sources—law enforcement agents, coroners, medical examiners, crime lab investigators, and state vital records offices. But these data are rarely combined in a systematic way to provide a complete picture of violent incidents—a picture with details about victims and suspects, their relationships, important circumstances contributing to a death, and weapons used.

The National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) is a nationwide, state-based surveillance system established in 2002 and funded by CDC to collect data on violent deaths from participating states. The CDC currently funds 18 states, who have each established a state violent death reporting system and voluntarily report state data to CDC.

Linking data from multiple sources

The NVDRS collects and links data from four major sources about the same violent death incident:
- Death certificates
- Coroner/medical examiner reports
- Law enforcement reports
- Crime laboratories

Some states may incorporate additional data sources, including Child Fatality Reviews or Domestic Violence Fatality Reviews. After all identifying information is removed, these data are linked in an anonymous state database and submitted to the NVDRS. The names of individual victims and suspects are not released, and laws protecting other types of health department records, such as communicable disease records, also apply to NVDRS files.

The power of an incident-based system

While some systems—such as vital statistics—count deaths, the NVDRS collects data on the entire violent incident. A single incident can have one or more victims and/or suspects. The NVDRS can identify all victims in a multi-homicide, or link victims and a suspect in a homicide-suicide.

Linking data into one database places a death into context and provides information not previously possible, such as:
- the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, including if they knew each other;
- information about the perpetrator, including criminal history;
- circumstances such as a history of depression or other mental health problems, chronic illness, alcohol or drug use, recent problems with a job, finances or relationships, gang activity, or the recent death of a family member; and
- circumstances unique to intimate partner violence, including prior incidents of abuse.

Translating data into action

The NVDRS provides the nation, states and communities with a clearer understanding of violent deaths and their circumstances by:
- describing the magnitude of and trends for specific types of violence,
- identifying risk factors associated with violence at state and local levels, and
- targeting and guiding state and local violence prevention programs, policies and practices.
TYPICAL DATA FROM NVDRS SOURCES

**DEATH CERTIFICATE**
- Age
- Gender
- Residence
- Marital status
- Profession
- Employment status
- Veteran status
- Cause of death
- Manner of death
- Time of death
- Pregnancy status

**MEDICAL EXAMINER/CORONER**
- Brief narrative of incident
- Demographics
- Wound location
- Weapon information, patterns on victim
- Cause of death
- Manner of death
- Current disease/health condition
- Current/recent medical treatment
- Current medication
- Relationships among involved persons (if available)
- Circumstances relevant to death

**LAW ENFORCEMENT**
- Narrative on the circumstances of the death
- Wound locations
- Weapon information
- Relationships among victim, perpetrator, others involved
- Information on suspect(s)
- Potential evidence to substantiate/support conclusion about violent death type (suicide, homicide)
- Presence/absence of suicide note
- Interviews with any witnesses, family members, others
- Critical stressors in victim’s life

**CHILD FATALITY REVIEW**
Information on victim’s:
- Household
- Caregivers
- Supervision
- Previous contacts with child protective services
- Relationship with perpetrator

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FATALITY REVIEW**
Information on current/former girlfriend, boyfriend, date, spouse
- Length of relationship
- Breakup/breakup in progress
- Court/prosecutor & restraining order records
- Domestic-violence related services (safety planning, shelter, lethality assessment)
- Perpetrator criminal history, charge/conviction
- # of children exposed to homicide

**TOXICOLOGY**
- Presence or absence of alcohol or drugs in victim(s)

**CRIME LAB**
Firearms involved
- Type, make & model
- Caliber or gauge
- Serial number
- Importer’s name & address

**DATA ELEMENTS OVERLAP**
Same information may come from multiple sources