



Firearm Violence in 2020: Rochester, New York

Part I – Analysis of Shooting Victims

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Overview

Violent crimes are perceived as the most common type of crime, because they get more attention from the media and law enforcement. However, violent crime makes up only 17% of total crime¹ in Rochester, NY. The seriousness of these incidents is one of the reasons for both the media and this series' focus. In 2020, there was a substantial increase in violent crime both nationally and locally. The violence levels in 2020 are unlike any in the last two decades, both in the City of Rochester and across New York State. This working paper series will look at shooting incidents, shooting victims, all homicides that occurred in 2020, and arrests for illegal weapons possession. This paper is the first of five in this series on local gun violence.

Shooting incidents and fatal and non-fatal shooting victims all increased in 2020, when compared to years prior. It is normal to expect and experience fluctuations in crime, though there are times when increases or decreases in crime are so drastic that it is outside of the expected norm. Previous research² suggests that +/- 20% is an 'expected' fluctuation range for shootings. The charts and discussion below will show the increase in these incidents, and the authors will offer solutions to keeping all critical conversations at the forefront. This analysis will be a series of short papers to discuss different types of shooting incidents and firearm-related crime. Below, an analysis of shooting victims will be presented.

Shooting Victims Data Discussion

Shooting victims are victims of firearm-related assaults that were struck with a bullet. The data include fatal and non-fatal shootings. For ease of discussion and to keep this paper brief, they are combined in each chart. In 2020, 82% of the 51 total homicides were firearm related, and will be included in this paper (fatal shooting victims). All 51 homicides will be discussed in the third paper in this series.

2020 Shooting Victims (Fatal and Non-Fatal)

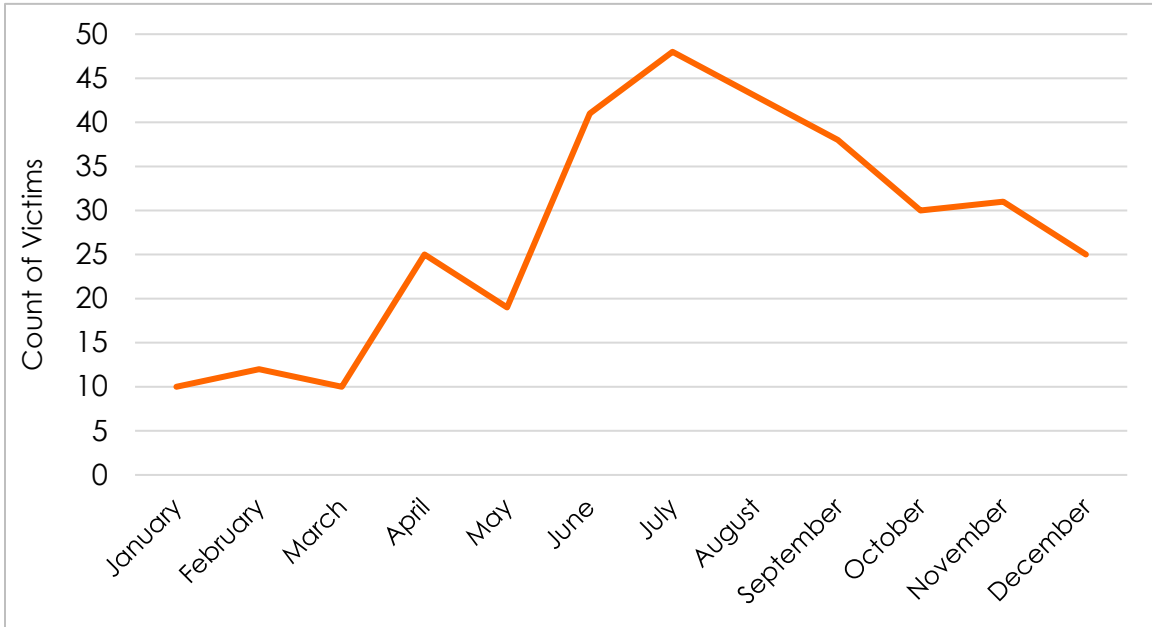
This paper focuses on the total number of victims. There were 333 total fatal and non-fatal shooting victims in Rochester, NY in 2020; 42 of these were fatal. The count of shooting *victims* does not always reflect the number of *incidents*; as some incidents include multiple victims. In 2020, about one-third (31%) of incidents had multiple victims. This is higher than the previous 5 years' shootings incidents, in which multiple victims ranged from 16%-26% of incidents. Chart 1 shows the number of shooting victims by month in 2020. This monthly breakdown shows a seasonal trend that is typical in colder climates, as more crime tends to occur in the warmer months³ of the year.

¹ Average of 2016-2020 Part I Crimes; <https://data-rpdny.opendata.arcgis.com/pages/crime>

² <https://www.rit.edu/liberalarts/sites/rit.edu.liberalarts/files/documents/our-work/Fluctuations%20in%20Rochester%20Violence%20Paper%202.0.pdf>

³ <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/spcvt.pdf>

Chart 1. Fatal and Non-Fatal Shooting Victims by Month in 2020, n = 333



More crime and violence tends to occur in the warmer months for a variety of reasons, such as more people are outside, and at events and parties. This alone will not increase crime, but the potential for problematic interactions is heightened. The fewest shooting victims occurred in January and March (n = 10), while the most occurred in July (n = 48). March 2020 is when New York went into a lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so it is not surprising that a low number of shootings occurred. However, March is typically a lower month for shootings (range of 3 to 14 victims from 2015-2019). Additionally, as seen in the chart below, victimization most frequently occurred on the weekend, and least frequently on Thursday.

Chart 2. Fatal and Non-Fatal Shooting Victims by Day of Week in 2020, n = 333

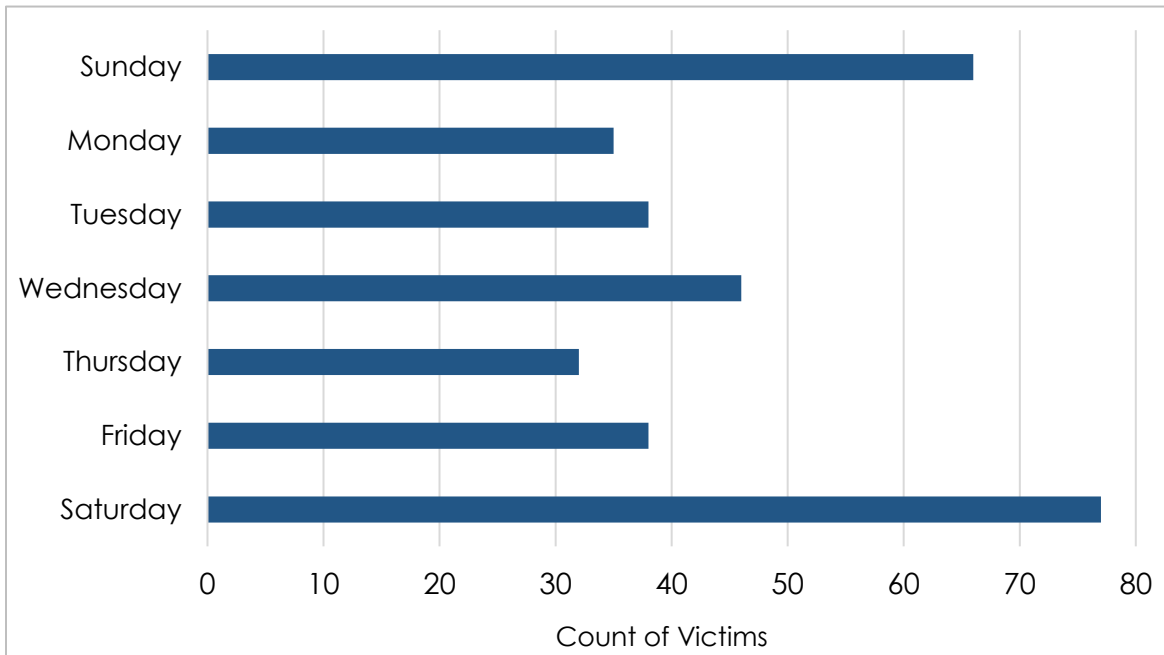
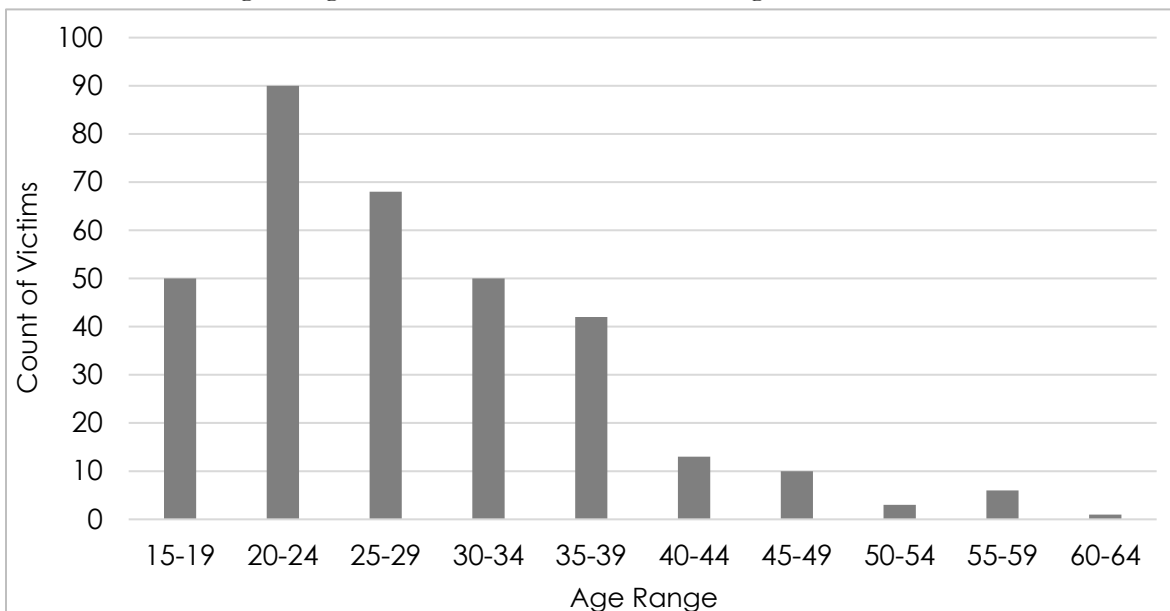


Chart 4. Age Range of Fatal and Non-Fatal Shooting Victims in 2020, n = 333



Of the 333 fatal and non-fatal shooting victims, 82% were male (n = 272) and 18% were female (n = 61). This is consistent with past years. Additionally, the age trend shown in Chart 4 matches many other age trends⁴ in crime; the twenties are often the highest rate of individuals involved in criminal activity, and the older the individual, the less likely they are to be involved in this activity. In 2020 the most common age of shooting victims was 22, and the median age was 26 (meaning that half of the victims were younger and half were older than 26). The age breakdown in this chart is consistent with years past. About 88% of victims were Black Non-Hispanic, 8.4% were White Hispanic, and 3.6% were White Non-Hispanic. This is typical in years past as well, where the 5-year average for Black Non-Hispanic shooting victims is 82.5%, White Hispanic and Non-Hispanic shooting victims are 11.4% and 4.5%, respectively.

Conclusions

Implications for Response

How do we move forward after a year as violent as 2020? One option is to focus on a two-pronged approach to violence: enforcement of gun offenders; and services and assistance for the victims and their families. However, shooting victims and perpetrators are not always this easily divided. A shooter in October may have been a victim in June. This does not mean that services still cannot be offered in an effort to directly prevent retaliation.

Regarding enforcement and prevention, focusing on retaliatory incidents can impact violence; RPD currently identifies disputes, but the responses, and tracking of such responses, have been challenging. Disputes can vary by reason (i.e., what is causing the problem), and the type of people who are involved (e.g., neighbors, family members, etc.), requiring unique responses for each dispute. However, intervening in these types of incidents can prevent smaller and sometimes trivial issues from

⁴ https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/60294_Chapter_23.pdf

escalating into violence and retaliation back and forth. Research has been conducted⁵ on retaliatory disputes and how to respond, and will be used in future planning and discussion on violence reduction.

In addition to law enforcement interventions, community-based responses to violence should be supported. Fully funding these alternatives would allow for community members to intervene in disputes through already established relationships. All interventions should ensure that both group and individual-level responses are fair, driven by data and evidence, and ensure safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Future Research

Upcoming papers on this topic will explore strategies to sustain violence reduction efforts during this uptick in violence. Future research will explore the causal factors for the increases in violence in 2020; the increases shown in the charts above are outside of both ‘expected’ crime levels and rates of fluctuations from year to year.

⁵ https://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/2020-spi_spotlight_series-retaliatoryviolentdisputes_final.pdf