

An Examination of Increases in Local and National Homicides and The Impact of COVID-19: Excerpts from a Newspaper Interview with Jackson State University Researchers

A Research Overview

(James Kelley and Dr. Sam Mozee)
March 2025

During an interview with the Clarion-Ledger newspaper on January 29, 2024, two Jackson State University's COEHD researchers (Dr. Sam Mozee and Mr. James Kelley) with the Mississippi Urban Research Center (MURC) discussed the issue of homicides occurring in Jackson (MS) and other U.S. cities. This research overview provides a brief summary of the major issues discussed during the January 29th interview. The overarching goal of this overview is to highlight research on potential causes, effects, and solutions related to the increases in homicides in Jackson and other cities occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped the landscape of American society in countless ways, with education and crime being two of the most deeply affected areas. Dr. Sam Mozee, Director of the Mississippi Urban Research Center at Jackson State University, and Mr. James Kelley, a research analyst at the center, conducted an interview with the Clarion Ledger's Mr. Charlie Drape. The interview focused on possible causes for the rise in homicides occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on homicides occurring in Jackson, Mississippi. Mozee and Kelley discussed possible causes, the effects created by those causes, and potential solutions to addressing reasons for the increases in homicides committed in the United States from 2019 to 2024.

COVID-19 and Homicide Increases

Between 2019 and 2021, Jackson (MS) saw an alarming 55% increase in homicides, culminating in a record 157 murders in 2021 (Drape, 2025). Mozee and Kelley discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant catalyst for the surge in homicides across the United States. As businesses shuttered, unemployment soared, and children were forced out of school, social instability grew, creating conditions ripe for crime (Politico, 2024). Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the number of homicides occurring in the City of Jackson (MS) between the years 2019 and 2024.

In discussing the possible reasons for the increases in homicides locally and nationally, Mozee stated "People were struggling and had a lot of time on their hands. Economic hardship and isolation are major stressors that can lead to increased criminal activity." A 2022 MURC study (O'Quinn, 2022) further supported this claim, showing an upward trend in gun violence and increased access to firearms since 2019, both in Jackson and across the country. Kelley added that Jackson was not unique in experiencing this crime wave, cities nationwide saw similar patterns, reinforcing the idea that the pandemic's social and economic disruptions were at the heart of the crisis.

Homicide Frequency by Year for Jackson Mississippi

Figure 1

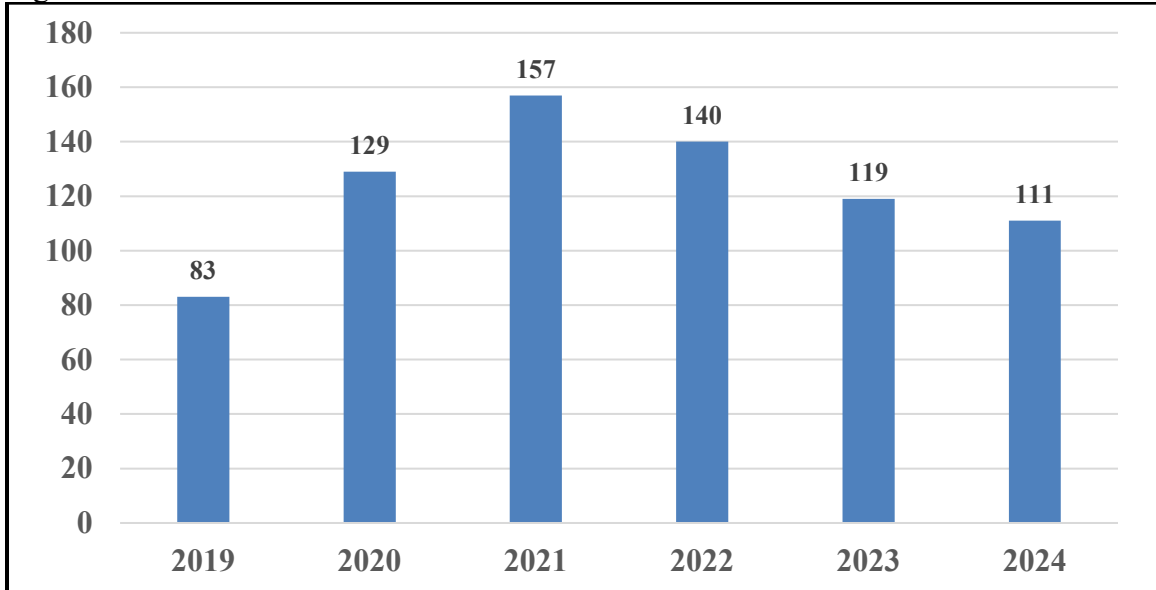


Figure 1 shows how the homicide numbers reached its peak in 2021. Even though the frequencies of homicides have been decreasing, they still are still above pre-pandemic levels in Jackson, MS (Drape, 2025).

Education Disruptions and Related Consequences

Just as crime spiked, the pandemic significantly disrupted education. School closures, remote learning, and reduced access to essential services left students struggling academically, socially, and emotionally (Baton Rouge Area Foundation, 2023). Mozee and Kelley noted that in communities with pre-existing challenges, such as high poverty rates and low educational attainment levels, COVID-19 related educational disruptions exacerbated existing learning and social stability issues. Mozee stated “a structured school environment provides more than just education, it offers stability, mentorship, and access to food and mental health services. When students lost that, many of them became more vulnerable to negative influences.”

Kelley emphasized that crime and educational instability are intertwined. “Without school as a stabilizing force, some young people became more susceptible to engaging in criminal activity, whether due to economic hardship, lack of supervision, or social pressures.”

Signs of Improvement

Despite the hardships of the past few years, recent data suggests that both crime rates and educational stability are improving (Keierleber, 2024). Jackson’s homicide rate has decreased annually since 2021, aligning with national trends. Experts attribute this to several factors, including post-pandemic economic recovery, school re-openings, and the implementation of proactive law enforcement strategies (O’Quinn, 2022).

One strategy that Mozee and Kelley highlighted during the newspaper interview is Community Oriented Policing (COP), which fosters stronger relationships between law enforcement and residents. “It allows officers to be more personal with the community,” Kelley said. “Hosting meetings, attending events, and engaging with the public can build trust and reduce crime before it happens.”

Additionally, technological advancements such as real-time surveillance and data analysis tools have aided law enforcement in their crime prevention efforts. Programs like the Connect JXN—Blue Light Safety Initiative, which integrates private security cameras with police monitoring systems, have provided law enforcement with more resources to combat crime effectively.

The Need for Long-Term Solutions

While the downward trend in homicide numbers and the return to in-person education are positive signs, Mozee and Kelley stressed the importance of long-term solutions to prevent future spikes in homicides. Investing in education, mental health services, and economic development will be critical in helping communities reduce the number of homicides occurring. MURC researchers believe crime is not an isolated issue. It is linked to education, economic opportunity, and social stability. Addressing these areas holistically is one way to create lasting change.

Mozee and Kelley ended the newspaper interview by stating for Jackson and other cities across the nation, the link between social/health/economic disruption such as the COVID-19 pandemic and increases in homicide rates is clear. What is needed moving forward are the continuation of enacting effective policing practices such as community engagement and utilizing technology-related tools, along with social and economic stabilization interventions such as job opportunities and mental health services, that help create a safer, more stable, less deadly future for citizens across the United States. Moving forward, it is crucial to prioritize the previously mentioned interventions and practices to prevent history from repeating itself.

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