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Study finds silver lining Police work may offset effects of high poverty, unemployment

As bad as Cincinnati's homicide rate is, high levels of poverty and unemployment in the city cause crime researchers to conclude that it could be worse.

That could mean that Cincinnati's police force is actually more effective than most police forces in dealing with violent crime, according to a new study from Georgia State University.

Cincinnati had 79 homicides in 2005 - enough to place it eighth among the nation's big cities in its per-capita homicide rate. But the study released Feb. 2 by the Improving Crime Data project suggests that Cincinnati's ranking would be lower - about 19th - if the city's poverty rate, unemployment rate, divorce rate and other "crime-producing factors" weren't so high.

While still high, that would put it behind cities considered safer, such as Columbus and Indianapolis. Here's another way to look at it: Given Cincinnati's population, the criminologists would have expected Cincinnati to have more like 85 homicides in 2005. The researchers say that's an inexact number, however, and place more emphasis on their adjusted rankings.

So why didn't Cincinnati have more killings? After controlling for all those other factors, one big factor is left over: the effectiveness of the local police department.

"If law enforcement were just doing a terrible job in Cincinnati, then Cincinnati would likely have a higher rank," said Richard B. Rosenfeld, a professor of criminal justice at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and one of the authors of the study. "As I recall, from news I read awhile back, that's not inconsistent with what your mayor was saying awhile back."

Mayor Mark Mallory, however, said he doesn't take much solace in the study.

"I think the situation is that there is a community standard that is not statistical. And our murder rate is beyond that community standard, and it's beyond the point where people are comfortable," he said. "There is no statistical analysis that can be done that makes people feel safe."

Police Chief Thomas H. Streicher Jr. could not be reached for comment last week. But the study validates his previous protests that the city's homicide numbers - taken alone - shouldn't be used as a report card for the city's crime-fighting strategy.

The study, funded by the U.S. Justice Department, looked at 2005 data, when the city had 79 homicides. That number increased to a modern record of 89 in 2006 - but as many as nine of those could be classified as justifiable, and so wouldn't be included in the final statistics reported to the FBI.

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Highest homicide rates

Criminologists ranked the homicide rates of U.S. cities with a population of more than 250,000 in 2005 - and then adjusted those rankings based on factors such as the poverty and unemployment rates. The resulting rankings more fairly reflect the effectiveness of the city's law enforcement efforts, they say:

Rank	Unadjusted	Adjusted
1.	Baltimore	San Francisco
2.	Detroit	Kansas City
3.	St. Louis	Washington
4.	Washington	Charlotte, N.C.
5.	Newark, N.J.	Oakland, Calif.
6.	Kansas City, Mo.	Baltimore
7.	Philadelphia	Pittsburgh
8.	Cincinnati	Nashville, Tenn.
9.	Cleveland	Tulsa, Okla.
10.	Oakland, Calif.	Phoenix
11.	Atlanta	Philadelphia
12.	Milwaukee	Aurora, Colo.
13.	Memphis, Tenn.	Minneapolis
14.	Buffalo, N.Y.	St. Louis
15.	Pittsburgh, Pa.	Indianapolis
16.	Nashville, Tenn.	Albuquerque, N.M.
17.	Dallas	Columbus
18.	Houston	Dallas
19.	Chicago	Cincinnati
20.	Tulsa, Okla.	Omaha, Neb.
21.	Phoenix	Boston
22.	Columbus	Houston
23.	Miami	Mesa, Ariz.
24.	Indianapolis	Newark, N.J.
25.	Boston	Denver

Source: Improving Crime Data project, Department of Criminal Justice, Georgia State University