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Statistical Overview of the North Carolina Death Penalty

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Abstract

Used in twenty-seven states, the death penalty is stated to be the punishment reserved for the "worst of the worst" crimes. What if death sentencing in North Carolina is not narrowly singling out those who commit the "worst of the worst" crime, but instead, the death penalty is imposed *with bias*, targeting individuals who specifically kill whites, females, or both? Of the 30,655 homicides in North Carolina since 1977, 419 offenders have been sentenced to die. My research aims to determine if there is a racial or gender disparity between the offenders and the victims related to death penalty sentencing...is the race or gender of the victim a determining factor when combined with the race and gender of the offender? Condemning an individual to death stands as one of the utmost punitive measures. It is therefore imperative to guarantee that the systems we use to do so are free from any bias. That is my goal here. The results indicate that we are failing this important test.

My results show that the cases in which a black individual has killed a white victim are more than five times more likely to receive death sentences than the cases in which a black individual has killed a black victim. More specifically, an individual is more than nine times more likely to be sentenced to death if they kill a white female compared to killing a black male. Furthermore, a black male who kills a white female is more than fifteen times more likely to be sentenced to death compared to cases in which a black male kills another black male. Generally, whether we look at executions or death sentences, there is a powerful statistical pattern that the death penalty is much more likely to be used in some cases rather than others. It is important to understand how these statistical trends operate within North Carolina, so we can then place them next to trends that occur within other states. Examination of racial bias is imperative in studies concerning capital punishment, as evidenced by the findings from this paper.

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