Homicide in Switzerland

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Introduction

Background

Homicide events in Switzerland do not only gain considerable attention from the general public, but have also provoked increasing scientific interest over the last few years. However, research on homicide is facing problems related to low absolute numbers, especially in small countries with low murder rates. To overcome this drawback, a national database of all cases of homicide, a regional sample of attempted homicides, and a national sample of suicides covering the entire country from the years 1980 to 2004 has been set up over several years, in a combined effort of the Institutes of Forensic Medicine and the Lausanne and Zurich Institutes of Criminology and with financial support from the Swiss National Science Foundation. This chapter is based on this database that contains information gathered from coroners', police and court records on offenders, victims, and events (Killias, Markwalder, Walser, & Dilitz, 2009). By completing the findings with official statistics and the existing literature in this field, this chapter aims to give an overview of homicide and its characteristics in Switzerland.

Switzerland

Switzerland is a small country in central Europe, with a surface comparable to, but a population about half of, the Netherlands. Surrounded by Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, Italy, and France, it has been able to keep out of wars between these nations for over two centuries thanks to its neutrality. With its direct democracy, Switzerland has one of the highest living standards in Western Europe, with a literacy rate of almost 100% and a life expectancy among the highest in the World (CIA, 2009). There are four official languages spoken in the country, which consist of German (63.7% of the population), French (20.4% of the population), Italian (6.5% of the population), and Romansh (0.5% of the population). Switzerland has one of the highest percentages of immigrants within Europe; in 2009, 22% of the population were of foreign nationality.[1] The majority of immigrants, namely 86%, come from countries within the European Union, especially Italy (17%), Germany (14.7%), and Portugal (12%), and 11% are immigrants from Serbia and Montenegro (OFS, 2009a).

In regard to firearm possession, Switzerland presents one of the highest prevalence of households owning at least one firearm (approximately 28%) in Europe. This high number is mainly due

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[1]Foreign nationality is defined as not being of Swiss nationality.

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to the Swiss militia system that drafts most young male Swiss citizens into the military and requires the soldiers to keep their army ordnance weapons at home. Furthermore, after completion of the military duty (which includes 18 or 21 weeks of mandatory training and then seven recalls of 3 weeks during the next 10 years), the soldier can acquire his ordnance weapon for private use. In former times, most soldiers kept their guns after being discharged. Today, this proportion has shrunk to about 10%, due to several conditions that nowadays have to be met (VBS, 2011). Table 22.1 (see Appendix, pg. 485 or online at extras.springer.com).

Definition of Homicide in Switzerland

Homicide and its various subtypes are described in the second book of the Swiss Criminal Code (StGB), under the first title called offences against life and limb (*Straftaten gegen Leib und Leben*). Article 111 covers premeditated homicide and constitutes the general clause of homicide (Stratenwerth & Jenny, 2003). It defines intentional homicide as the intentional causing of the death of a person without the presence of special conditions enumerated in the following sections. Therefore, article 111 represents a residual category, applicable only if no other aggravated or privileged type of homicide described by the articles 112, 113, 114, and 116 of the Swiss Criminal Code is more suitable *in casu*. This three-level legal model (one neutral article as basis, followed by aggravated (qualified) and minor (privileged) legal dispositions) is also in use in the German and Italian penal legislations (Schwarzenegger, 2007).

The Swiss Criminal Code knows one qualified form of homicide ("first-degree murder" according to section 112) and three less severe forms, namely manslaughter (or second-degree murder, section 113), homicide on request of the victim (article 114) and infanticide (or neonaticide, section 116). Murder according to article 112 stipulates that the offender acts in a particularly reprehensible, unscrupulous manner, i.e., his motives, the method, or the circumstances of the act are particularly shocking (Schwarzenegger, 2007).[2] First-degree murder is, according to section 112, punishable by either lifelong imprisonment or imprisonment no less than 10 years. It is for the rare offences that lifelong imprisonment is allowed.

Sections 113, 114, and 116 of the Swiss Criminal Code describe privileged forms of homicide.[3] Section 113 defines manslaughter as an intentional homicide committed under conditions of extreme (and excusable) emotions, or in a state of profound mental confusion. Section 114 provides for a prison sentence not exceeding 3 years for homicide at the request of the victim, and section 116 defines infanticide, i.e., the killing of a new-born by the mother either during or immediately following delivery. The sections 111–116 SCC require the offender to present the intention to kill his/her victim(s). However, if the death of a person was caused without such an intention, i.e., through negligence or recklessness, section 117 SCC (negligent manslaughter) is applicable.

Previous Studies on Homicide

Because of a very limited amount of nationwide data sources on homicide, research on national homicide trends has remained rather limited. First trend data, covering the period from 1877 to the present, were published by Killias (1991) and Bieri (1998). Cross-sectional data on police records of attempted and completed homicides were published by the Federal Office of Statistics, with a focus on domestic violence (Zoder & Maurer, 2006). To overcome the limits related to too small absolute numbers, a national database of all cases of completed homicide was established by all Swiss institutes of Forensic Medicine and coordinated by the Institutes of Criminology

[2] This notion of unscrupulous manner was introduced by the amendement of 1989 and remplaced the concept of reprehensible attitude or dangerousness in the original version of 1937.

[3] Article 115 StGB concerns the incitement of or assistance with suicide (punishable only if the motives are egoistic). This offence, thus, does not constitute homicide.

of the Universities of Lausanne and Zurich (Killias et al., 2009). This database will be presented in more detail later. It covers the period of 1980–2004 (in some areas, records older than 1990 were no longer available), with a random sample of all suicides and a regional sample of attempted homicides. Finally, the first step of the Swiss Homicide and Suicide Database project sponsored by the Swiss National Science Foundation consisted of creating a database limited to four cantons in the French-speaking part of Switzerland and was based on legal medicine, police and court files (Villettaz, Killias, & Mangin, 2003). This first database was used in several MA dissertations (Chamot, 2003; Ruiz, 2007).

Some studies have analyzed homicide within the context of violence in general at the regional level. Eisner (1997), for example, analyzed 1,100 police reports on homicide, assault, robbery, and sexual violence in the city of Basel and analyzed victim, offender and circumstantial variables for these offences. Another study (Frei, Graf, & Dittmann, 2003) is based on 81 homicides in the region of Basel City and it particularly considered the ethnical aspect of these crimes. Further, Massonnet, Wagner, and Kuhn (1990) analyzed basic victim, offender, and circumstantial variables and based their research on police reports of the canton of Zurich and Vaud. Another study (Fernandez & La Harpe, 1996) covered homicides in the Canton of Geneva between 1971 and 1990 by analyzing files from the Institute of Legal Medicine in Geneva.

Specific subtypes of homicides have also been the subject of studies. Homicides within the family and intimate partnerships have been especially subject to extensive research (Baggiano, 2004; Bayala, 2006; Buonvicini, 2007; Killias, Dilitz, & Bergerioux, 2006; Levray, 2007; Pedevilla, 2008; Zoder, 2008; Zoder & Maurer, 2006). Furthermore, some studies have more closely examined child-victims of homicide (Bärtsch, 1997; Michaud, 1985). In recent years, homicide followed by the suicide of the offender has gained considerable attention, which is a reason why research has considerably increased in this field (Frei, Han, Weiss, Dittmann & Adjacic Gross, 2006; Grabherr et al., 2010; Haenel & Elsasser, 2000; Liem, Barber, Markwalder, Killias, & Nieuwbeerta, 2011). Furthermore, legal aspects of homicide offenders (Contat, 2005; Rodieux, 2008), serial homicide offending (Brughelli, 2010) and certain other aspects of homicide events, such as factors influencing the lethal outcome of an aggression (Décosterd, 2007), situational factors and modus operandi (Hardegger, 2008), as well as unsolved homicide cases (Gruber, 2005) have been subject to these studies based on the French part of the homicide database.[4]

Data Sources Used for This Study

General Description of the Database

The Swiss Homicide Database (SHD) is part of a research project realized by the Universities of Zurich and Lausanne and sponsored by the Swiss National Science Foundation SNF (Killias et al., 2009). The project's goal was to improve the empirical knowledge about homicide and suicide in Switzerland by creating a national homicide and suicide database based on legal medicine, police and court files. The first part of this project started in 2001 and was limited to four cantons in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.[5] After completion of this first SNF-project, the SNF sponsored an extension of the project to all Swiss cantons. The extended Swiss project differs only slightly from the original project. To shorten the already complex data collection process, only completed homicides were included in the data collection, excluding attempts that were previously considered. Also, some questions have been added to the original questionnaire to complete the database.

[4] These theses are limited to the French part of Switzerland because they are based on the first homicide database project in four french-speaking cantons. For more information about this database, see Villettaz et al. (2003).

[5] The fist project included homicides in the cantons of Vaud, Neuchâtel, Valais, and Fribourg (Villettaz et al., 2003).

As a general rule, only cases that were assumed to be committed *intentionally* by the offender were considered in the data collection process, whereas negligent manslaughter or assaults followed by death of the victim were not taken into consideration. However, this selection process was sometimes difficult to achieve, as legal medicine files, which constituted the starting point of the data collection, do not usually include legal classification of the offense. Hence it was sometimes not possible to clearly know from the beginning whether the offender would be found guilty of an intentional offense or not,[6] so there are a limited number of marginal cases where the intention of the offender was not clear from the beginning.[7] Furthermore, some offenders were consecutively discharged by the courts. Also, in some cases with multiple offenders, not all of them were finally found guilty as cooffenders[8] of homicide by the courts, but convicted of a less serious crime, such as aggravated assault (Article 122 SCC). To keep the complete picture of the case and those involved in it, most cases include data on all participants of the crime, regardless of the legal outcome of their conviction.

Data Collection and Timeline of the Data

As a first step in the data collection process, homicide cases were identified through autopsy registries in the Institutes of Forensic Medicine of Lausanne, Geneva, Berne, Basle, Zurich, St. Gallen, Chur, and Lugano. All intentional homicide cases that took place in Switzerland between the years 1980 and 2004 were collected. Therefore, the study presents a complete dataset of all homicides that took place in Switzerland during this period of time, with exception of the region of Berne where the Institute of Forensic Medicine's records prior to 1991 were no longer available. In some other cantons, some files were not available electronically before 1985 and could therefore not be retrieved. Further, cases where no autopsy has been performed are not included in the study. However, such cases are rare in Switzerland, at least in fatalities with an unknown cause where a homicide cannot be excluded from the beginning.

In a second step, police and court files were used to complete the data from the Institutes of Forensic Medicine. As autopsy files mostly contain information about the homicide victim, as well as about medically relevant circumstances of the act, this step was particularly important for data concerning offender characteristics, legal qualifications, and circumstances of the act that were not relevant to medical examiners and therefore rarely present in autopsy reports. Finally, the earlier data collection of the four French-speaking cantons has been updated to the year 2004 and merged into the new nationwide sample.

Data Coding

The data collected in the institutes of legal medicine, with the police, or in court archives were coded electronically, using a coding file for general case information, one for victim information and a third one for offender information. Filemaker (Filemaker Pro 2005) was used for registering data electronically. Although the Swiss homicide and suicide research project combined several data sources to obtain a complete dataset, the problem of missing data could not be avoided completely. Indeed, legal medicine as well as police and court records do not systematically include all pieces of information that are requested in our coding list. This is particularly true for variables that are not directly relevant to the police investigation. Therefore, it is essential to deal with missing cases in a coherent way. In this research, the technique of complete case analysis (or listwise deletion) was chosen, one of the most commonly used techniques to deal with missing data in homicide research (Riedel & Regoeczi,

[6] This is especially true for cases where no trial had been held yet. Furthermore, for cases with unknown offenders, the intent of the offender was determined on the base of presently known circumstances.

[7] There are 30 cases with known offenders which can be classified as "borderline" intentional.

[8] For the notion of cooffending in Swiss Criminal Law, see Trechsel & Killias (2004).

2004). This technique implies that all cases with no relevant information available were excluded for the analysis, and therefore only "valid" cases were considered. However, when it comes to questions in our coding list that allow for a "no" answer, the items left empty and the "no" answers were combined, given that an "empty" cell could also mean that the characteristic in question (e.g., a history of alcohol abuse) is not present. In other cases, the missing values only consist of cases with unknown offenders, cases where the court files were not available, and cases from the 2001 project that did not collect all of the information included in the 2004 coding list.

Data Limitations

As the database is based on autopsy registries, cases without any autopsy performed are naturally lacking. However, in cases of homicide, an autopsy is almost always ordered by legal officials, and the number of missing cases due to the inexistence of an autopsy is therefore small. In fact, a comparison of homicides followed by suicide in the Swiss database with homicide-suicide reports from the Swiss newspaper NZZ between 1995 and 2004 has shown that only 16% of all cases were not reported in our database, but reported in the newspaper. Homicide-suicide constitutes, however, a special category of homicide, since the death of the offender usually closes the investigation and an autopsy of the persons involved is not routinely ordered. Thus, for other homicide constellations, the proportion of cases not examined by coroners is certainly far below 16%. In sum, cross-checking with a different source reveals a rather high degree of matching.

Some of the earlier cases before 1985 might be missing due to the nonavailability of these data in electronic format. Also, some files were unavailable or could not be found anymore in the legal medicine archives. Finally, as homicide is a rare event in Switzerland, the validity of the data might be limited due to the small number of events whenever less usual categories of homicide are at stake.

Epidemiology of Homicide in Switzerland

Recent Trends in Homicide

Homicide rates in Switzerland are relatively low in comparison with other European countries. With a homicide rate of 0.9 per 100,000, Switzerland presents one of the lowest rates in Europe (Malby, 2010). According to the Swiss Office of Federal Statistics (OFS), the total number of homicide offences (article 111–116 SCC) known to the police presents only slight variations during the last 20 years. However, a strong trend toward an increase of attempted homicides is visible over the years, whereas completed homicides decrease during the same span of time. A project on whether or not this can be attributed to improved emergency care has just been started by the University of Zurich Institute of Criminology and the Emergency Department of the Zurich University Hospital (Fig. 22.1 - see Appendix, pg. 484 or online at extras.springer.com).

Together with arrest rates and data from the SHD, data on convictions are presented in Fig. 22.1. Here as well, a trend is difficult to discern, although a slight increase in convictions based on sections 111–116 SCC can be observed over the years. However, the numbers for the most recent years do not contain cases that were not yet finally adjudicated. Conviction data combine completed and attempted homicide.

Incident Characteristics[9]

In total, there are 1,313 cases (events) in the SHD, with 1,403 offenders who ended the lives of 1,464 victims. For the variables on type of incidents, location of the homicide, as well as modus operandi, the analysis was conducted based on the number of cases. By doing so, we avoid the distortion of the findings by cases with a high number of

[9] Because of the small size of Switzerland and the relatively low number of homicide cases per year, rates of regional homicide distribution would not be very relevant; therefore, the analysis is based on national homicide cases only, without disaggregation into regional subgroups.

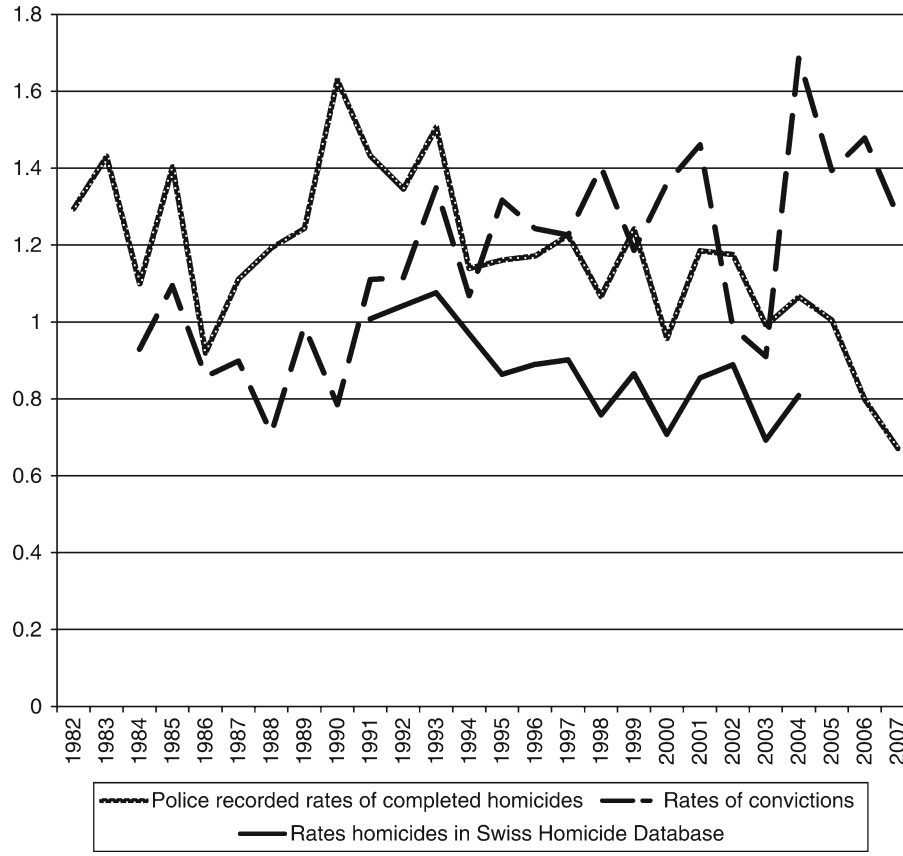

Fig. 22.1 Rates per 100,000 of police-recorded homicides, conviction rates and homicide rates from the Swiss Homicide database

victims. In total, there are only two cases with more than ten victims in our database. One case concerns the incident in the government of the canton of Zug in the year 2001, where 14 persons were killed by a gunman. The second case concerns the male "death nurse" of Lucerne who, during his employment in a nursing home, killed 22 patients. However, all victims as well as all offenders will be considered in connection with alcohol and drug influences as well as demographic variables.

Type of Incidents by to Motive & Victim–Offender Relationship

Based on 1,313 cases, almost half of the homicide incidents happened within the family (N=605). Domestic homicide, as used here, includes homicides within the family, intimate partners or love rivals. This category includes killings of children (13.7%), other family members (19.8%), current and former intimate partners (57%), and rivals (8.1%). The next category in prevalence, with 17% of all cases, is homicides as a result of arguments or altercations. Homicide in connection with robbery makes up for 7%, while other criminal homicide makes up for 16% and includes cases connected to drug sales, organized crime, and any other criminal activities. Sexual homicide includes killings of prostitutes or their clients or killings in combination with a sex crime, such as sexual assault or rape, and accounts for 4% of all homicide cases.

The residual category of "other homicides" includes various constellations, such as unknown offenders and circumstances, homicide related to psychiatric disorder, and other cases that did not fit the other categories. This residual category accounts for 17% of our cases (Fig. 22.2).

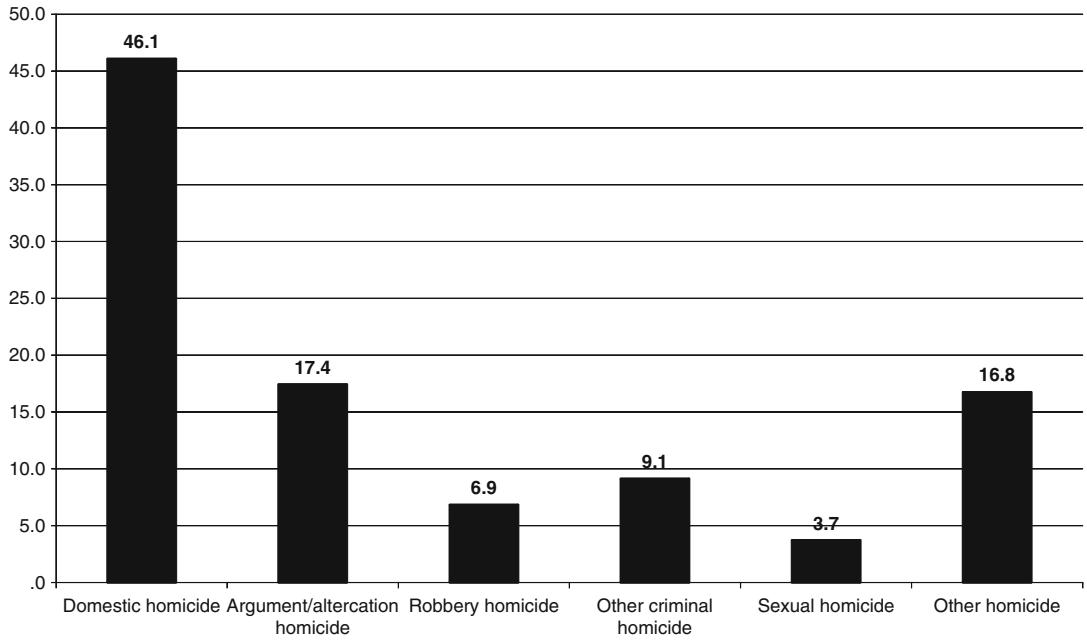

Fig. 22.2 Typology of homicide cases in Switzerland, in %

Table 22.1 Prevalence of completed intentional homicide (total, within the family including intimate partners, and homicides followed by suicide) in 7 countries (several recent years)

Country	Total	Within the family		Homicide followed by suicide	
	Per 1 million population	Per 1 million population	In % of all homicides	Per 1 million population	In % of all homicides
USA	56	7.9	14	2.2	3.9
Finland	24	6.9	29	1.6	5.8
Canada	20	5.7	29	2.0	10
Australia	20	7.0	35	1.2	6
Netherlands	15	4.3	29	0.5	3.3
Switzerland	10	4.1	43	0.9	14
Spain	10	1.8	18	n.a.	n.a.

Source: Killias, Redondo, & Sarnecki (2011) (with indication of sources)

The preponderance of domestic homicides in Switzerland is even more visible in an international comparison. As Table 22.1 shows, Switzerland presents the highest percentage of homicides within the family as well as homicides followed by suicides among the few countries for which the necessary data was available. It ranges among the countries with the lowest overall homicide rate.

The high proportion of domestic homicides is by no means related to a high rate of domestic violence. To the contrary, the International Violence against Women Survey (IVAWS) has shown that women in Switzerland are considerably less often exposed to (former or actual) partner violence than women living in Denmark, Costa Rica, Italy (ISTAT, 2007), and six more countries that participated in the IVAWS (Johnson, Nevala, & Ollus, 2008). As will be shown later, the surprising frequency of domestic homicide is likely to be due to the high prevalence of guns in Swiss households.

In most of the cases (92.9%), the homicide took place between one offender and one victim. However, multiple victims and offenders are more frequent among some categories. Domestic homicides, for instance, present the highest amount of multiple victims, namely 8%, whereas sexual homicides are almost exclusively committed against one single victim. For all other categories, the percentage of cases with multiple victims ranges between 5.6 and 6.4%. On the contrary, robbery homicides are frequently committed in groups, as 25% of cases in this subtype involved multiple offenders. Criminal homicides are also often committed in groups, with more than one offender being involved in 14% of all cases. Only half as many multiple offenders (7%) can be found in the argument/altercation category. In all other subgroups, multiple offenders are below average (Fig. 22.4 - see Appendix, pg. 485 or online at extras.springer.com).

Location

In over half of the homicide cases (57%), the location of the offence is situated in a private dwelling, whereas 30% of homicides take place in public places, such as streets, bars, or other openly accessible places. Only a minority of cases take place in natural areas (6%), on the workplace (4%) or in other locations (3%).

However, there is considerable variation in location within the different subtypes of homicides. Domestic as well as sexual homicide cases are usually committed in a private dwelling, whereas criminal homicides, argument homicides as well as robbery homicides are more prevalent in public areas. This is plausible given the relationship between victims and offenders and the situations in which these homicides occur. Homicides in the workplace are rare in general, but frequent within robbery homicides, with stores, restaurants, or banks offering many opportunities for stealing or robbing. Argument homicides also relatively often take place in the workplace. Finally, sexual homicides are relatively frequent in natural areas. This might be due to the fact that offenders may have brought victims of sexual assault or prostitutes to some remote place to be hidden from public view.

Modus Operandi

Firearms are the modal weapon of homicide in Switzerland. In 44% of all homicide cases, the offender killed his victim with a firearm. This percentage is even higher for criminal homicides, where almost 70% of the cases are perpetrated by means of a firearm. For all other types of homicides, the use of firearms lies within 40% of the cases. However, sexual homicides present an exception to this rule, since only 6% of the cases were committed with a firearm. In this category, knives and strangulation are the dominant modus operandi, with 43% involving knives and 41% strangulation – which were actually the highest proportions of these modi operandi across all homicide categories. Knives, used in 30% of all homicide cases, are the second most prevalent weapon in homicide. They are more frequently used in sexual homicides and argument homicides, whereas firearms prevail in all other types of homicide.

Alcohol and Drugs

Our variable of substance influence during the homicide act includes alcohol, soft drugs, hard drugs, psychotropic medication, and other medication, as well as other substances. If no indication of a substance was found in the files, we assumed that victims as well as offenders were not under the influence of any substance during the offence. Therefore, our estimate of the prevalence of substance use is conservative and probably underestimates the true impact of intoxication.

For homicide in general, victims and offenders are equally under the influence of alcohol or drugs during the event. Around 35% of them present any kind of intoxication during the offence. However, the prevalence of substance use differs considerably across types of homicides. In all categories but domestic and robbery homicides, victims present a higher rate of intoxication than offenders. Sexual homicide victims were, with 60% of positive drug tests, found to be the victims most often under the influence, followed by argument and criminal homicide victims.

When it comes to the relative victim and offender intoxication, subgroups again differ considerably. As already stated, victims and offenders

show, overall, similar rates of intoxication. However, victims of criminal homicides are far more often under the influence (49%) than offenders (30%). Apparently, victims are perhaps selected by offenders in view of their intoxication, which could indicate that criminal homicides are more premeditated and planned and less often committed by offenders under the influence. Furthermore, sexual homicide victims as well as offenders present the highest percentage of intoxication. It should be noted, however, that these observations are based on low absolute numbers.

Victim Characteristics

Age and Gender Distributions

Age

In general, the mean age of homicide victims is 36 in Switzerland. However, there is considerable variation across types of homicide. The youngest victims can be found in the criminal homicide category (31.6), followed by domestic homicide victims (34.0), argument homicide victims (37.0), other homicide victims (38.4), and sexual homicide victims (41.2). Considerably older are victims of robbery homicide, with a mean age of 50.7.

The peak in domestic homicide victims aged 0 is mainly due to neonaticide cases that are relatively frequent ($N=22$). Overall, homicide victims tend to be considerably older than victims of other violent crimes, as assessed by crime surveys (Killias et al., 2007).

Gender

Gender is a very discriminating variable for the different types of homicide, since 56% of all homicide victims are male and 44% are female. Therefore, the overall risk of becoming a homicide victim is only slightly higher for men than for women. However, if we consider the different subtypes of homicide, the proportion of male and female victims differs considerably. Female victims are overrepresented in the categories of domestic homicides (68%) as well as sexual homicides (54%). In all other categories, males are predominantly victimized. The prevalence of male victims is around 10% higher than average in the categories of robbery homicides (66%) and other homicides (66%), whereas criminal homicides and argument homicides present almost exclusively male victims (92 and 88%, respectively).

Overall, homicide concerns women in similar proportions as assault or robbery according to Crime Victim Surveys (Killias et al., 2007).

Ethnicity

The question of the ethnicity or nationality of homicide offenders and victims has received considerable scientific and political attention throughout Switzerland and other European countries over the past few years. We included in the category of foreign nationals all persons that were described as foreign nationals, i.e., persons without a Swiss passport, in the legal medicine, police and court files.

As indicated earlier, foreign nationals residing in Switzerland account for around 22% of the population. Hence, victims of foreign nationality are overrepresented in almost all homicide categories, except for robbery and sexual homicide. This is in contrast to crime victim surveys that did not find disproportionate violent victimization rates among immigrants (Killias et al., 2007).

Offender Characteristics

Age and Gender Distributions

Age

Generally, with a mean age of 34 years, homicide offenders are younger than their victims. However, the mean age varies across homicide categories. The youngest offenders can be found in cases of robbery homicide (26.7 years), sexual homicide (29.2 years), criminal homicide (29.65 years), and argument homicide (31.8). Offenders in the residual category of "other homicides" have a mean age similar to the overall average (34.5). Finally, offenders of domestic homicide are considerably older than those in other homicide categories, with a mean age of 38 years. Given the large proportion of domestic homicides in Switzerland, we can conclude that the general average age is inflated. However, even if only nondomestic categories of homicide are considered, murderers are obviously older than violent offenders in general (Killias, 2011).

Gender

Homicide is, in general as well as within the different subtypes, mainly perpetrated by males. In total, nine out of ten offenders are male, and only the category of domestic homicide presents, with 16% of female offenders, a different picture. However, this finding can be explained by the category of neonaticides, where the offenders are almost exclusively female. In all other categories, the proportion of female offenders is minimal, ranging from 1% in cases of argument and 2% in robbery homicides to 4% in cases of sexual criminal homicides, 7% in cases of criminal homicides and, finally, 9% in "other" homicide cases.

Ethnicity

In general, around half of the homicides are committed by foreign nationals. Given the fact that the foreign population in Switzerland constitutes only 22% of the total population, foreign offenders are highly overrepresented. Only domestic as well as sexual homicides are committed by a majority of Swiss offenders. In all other categories, foreign nationals outnumber Swiss offenders. This is particularly the case for homicides in the context of arguments and altercations, where foreign citizens account for 68% of the offenders. The residual category also presents a high share of foreign offenders. For criminal and robbery homicides, around half of the offenders were foreign citizens. Therefore, nationality constitutes a highly discriminating factor in assessing the risk of homicide offending. This is also true for violent offences in general and according to police statistics, victims' accounts of offender characteristics during crime surveys and self-report studies (Killias, 2009).

Explanations for Homicide Specific to the Nation

Firearm Availability

As mentioned earlier, Switzerland presents one of the highest percentages of gun ownership per household in Western Europe. This high number of firearms in private possession is mainly due to military weapons that are legally kept at home. Since Chap. 14 in the first volume of this book will cover the relationship between firearms availability and violence in Europe in general, as well as in Switzerland specifically, readers will find detailed information in that chapter.

Policies Specific to the Nation

Domestic Violence Programs

To prevent domestic violence, the Swiss legislature has changed violence and rape within partnerships into a crime that is to be prosecuted without any initiative or request by the victim. Furthermore, several cantons have introduced new laws that require, in case of a police intervention, the abusive partner in a relationship to leave the common dwelling for at least 10 days.[10] However, to date, there are no evaluations that have tested the efficiency of these relatively new policies in regard to domestic violence in general and homicide within families and intimate partnerships specifically.

Conclusions

In sum, Switzerland has a low homicide rate in comparison to Europe and a rather stable development of homicide incidents over the last 20 years. With almost half of the cases, homicides within the family or intimate partnerships constitute the most current type, whereas argument homicides and homicides in the criminal milieu are, with 17 and 16%, respectively, much less prevalent. A considerable number of offences, namely 44%, are perpetrated with a firearm, making firearms the most frequently-used modus operandi in Swiss homicides. Thus, Switzerland presents a much higher amount of domestic homicides as well as

[10]The cantons of St. Gallen and Appenzell AR were the first cantons to introduce mandatory expulsion from the common dwelling in 2003. The legal foundation of this policy is defined in section 43 to 43quinquies of the law for the maintenance of public order of the canton of St.Gallen as well as in the section 17 of the law for the maintenance of public order of the canton of Appenzell AR.

gunshot fatalities then most other European countries, which is most likely linked to the high prevalence of firearms in Swiss households.

With respect to the different types of homicides, we noticed considerable differences among the analyzed subtypes. They differ among each other not only with respect to circumstantial variables, but also in their characteristics of victims and offenders. Disaggregation has, thus, allowed retrieving valuable detailed information about the different homicide constellations that would have gone unnoticed in an aggregated data sample. Hence, for future research, we suggest the use of disaggregated homicide data for analysis in order to respect these particularities within the different subgroups.

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