

Homicide Patterns and Trends in Europe and Beyond: Introduction to the Special Issue

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This special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* (JCCJ) focuses on the Homicide Patterns and Trends in Europe and Beyond. The analyses presented in this special issue are based on the data sourced from the European Homicide Monitor (thereafter EHM) or a similar system. The EHM constitutes a standardized data collection framework allowing for detailed analyses on case, victim, and perpetrator level. Because of its standardized data format, the EHM also facilitates international comparisons, thus allowing the studies included in this special issue to be extended to several new research locations.

The lead article by the editors presents a stock-taking of the EHM-based research so far and reveals the need for further improvements in the data collection and analytic approaches in order to promote cross-national homicide research.

As an example of a cross-national study on homicide, in the second article of the special issue, Janne Kivivuori, Shanta Balgobind Singh, Karoliina Suonpää, Gerelene Jagganath, Anna Raeste, Sultan Khan, Patrick Bashizi Bashige Murhula, and Robert Chetty compare the characteristics of homicides in global extremes, the global north (Finland) and global south (South Africa). Their highly informative study demonstrates the application of EHM outside its original European context.

Another comparative study, conducted by Katharina Krüsselmann, focuses on the existing theoretical approaches to the use of firearms in homicide. Based on a comprehensive review, the author concludes that these mainly U.S.-centered theories are inadequate for explaining the impact of firearms on the prevalence and nature of lethal violence in Europe.

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Two articles in this special issue are based on Swedish data, and both are based on the EHM methodology. Sven Granath analyzes the trend in firearm and criminal milieu-related homicide in Sweden in the last three decades. He finds that these types of homicides have increased over the recent decades and correlates this trend to the growing involvement of young male victims and perpetrators in drug trade, as well as to greater access to illegal weapons. The currently high levels of such violence in Sweden, Granath argues, should be placed within a wider context of organized crime, and may be linked to an increase in social problems in Sweden in the aftermath of high immigration from developing countries, along with changes in welfare institutions. Although this negative trend has been a major focus in the Swedish and European political debate, as Klara Hradilova Selin and David Shannon point out, such homicides still account for a minority of the total number of violent deaths in Sweden. Most homicides occur in socially marginalized groups where mental illness is more prevalent, and often take place within a family context. In their contribution, Hradilova Selin and Shannon examine diagnosed mental health disorders among nearly 800 perpetrators of homicide in Sweden and find that four of 10 of these individuals had been in contact with psychiatric services during the year preceding the crime.

The contribution by Andri Ahven and Kaire Tamm shifts our gaze to Estonia. Based on their analysis of homicide patterns in this country in the last three decades, the authors conclude that—in line with the general European trend—homicide rates in Estonia have been on a decline and reached their lowest point in recent years. Similar to other countries in the region, a significant portion of homicides were preceded by quarrels that arose in the course of joint alcohol consumption. This pattern was mirrored in the study conducted by Sigita Černevičiūtė, Aleksandras Dobryninas, and Daumantas Stumbrys. Based on unique homicide data from Lithuania, these authors found that more than half of the homicide offenders were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the offense.

The articles included in this special issue show that homicide studies in Europe are diverse and are not limited to macro-level analyses. Due to the EHM methodology, homicide can now be studied on a disaggregated level in various European countries and beyond, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the correlates of homicide, with the view of further curbing this type of violence through suitable policy reforms.

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