

Summary

Homicide in the Netherlands in 1998

Homicide is an offence that attracts much attention. In spite of this, relatively little scientific research has been devoted to it. One of the reasons is that extensive information on a systematic basis on homicide is not available. The WODC in co-operation with the National Police Agency (KLPD) has created a data set containing detailed information on homicides in 1998. In the research presented here the structure of this data set is described and the results for 1998 are given.

Various sources were used to fill the data set. Two data sets from the KLPD were used, one with general information on each homicide, one with more detailed information on homicides with a sexual or bizarre motive. Also newspaper clippings were used to validate the data. The most important source consisted of interviews held with the police officers responsible for the investigations. For the prosecution and court decisions the OMdata system from the prosecutor's office was used.

Data were structured into four different groups: the victims, the known offenders, the events (a homicide event being an incident where one or more victims are killed by zero or more known offenders) and the relations between victims and offenders.

Two main dimensions were used to classify homicides: the motive of the offender and the relation between offender and victim. This resulted in the following eleven categories: liquidations, drug-related, criminal-other, sexual, robbery, intimate, fights between acquaintances, fights between strangers, psychotic, other and unknown.

Homicide, defined as the unjustifiable (i.e., not out of self-defence), intentional killing of another person, is covered in Articles 287 through 292 of the Netherlands penal code. Not covered in these articles are euthanasia, assistance to suicide and abortion. Only completed homicides are taken into account. Given these restrictions, there were in 1998 in the Netherlands 202 homicide events with 225 victims and 230 known offenders. This means that there are 1.6 victims of homicide per 100,000 inhabitants. During the last ten years this number was fairly constant in the Netherlands. Also, it is about average when compared to other EU countries.

Nearly a third (32%) of the homicides are found to be 'intimate' homicides (the victim is used as the counting unit) and about a fifth (21%) belong to one of the three 'criminal' categories (liquidation, drug-related and criminal-other). Homicides generally receiving the most publicity in the Netherlands, sexual and disputes between strangers, each constituted only 4% of the total. Regarding method of death, it was found that 40% of the victims in 1998 were killed by a gun, 27% by a knife, and 33% by other means. When comparing these figures with data from previous years, there appears to be an increase in the percentage of gun killings (32% in 1989). Relatively, firearms are used more by men than by

women, and more by ethnic non-Dutch than ethnic Dutch offenders. Most of the homicides occur in the western part of the Netherlands, in particular in the cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. Also, more than half (53%) of the homicides are committed inside a house, most of them in the house of the victim. Over the year, June, July, November and January are the months with the most homicides. Homicides occur mainly at night, Friday and Saturday nights being the most prominent.

The majority (91%) of the offenders is male and most of the offenders are between 20 and 40 years old. The sex and age distribution for victims is slightly different: 74% of the victims is male and there are more victims under 20 and over 40 when compared to the offenders. Looking at ethnicity, 63% of the offenders and 50% of the victims are ethnic non-Dutch.

In terms of lifestyle, a substantial number of offenders are unemployed (28%) at the time of their offence. Also, 43% of the offenders are found to have a criminal record, although the criminal background of 38% could not be established. About a quarter of the offenders are chemically addicted, most of them to drugs. Roughly the same percentage were said to be intoxicated at the time of their offence; here however, alcohol was more important than drugs. For the victims, the percentages of unemployment, criminal background, alcohol and drugs are considerably lower.

At least two thirds of the victims are acquainted with the offenders. And about a quarter of the victims have an intimate relationship with the offender. When children are murdered, the offenders are almost always their parents. Mostly, homicides are brought to the attention of the police through witnesses or by finding a body. For homicides in the category 'Intimate' the offender often reports the homicide to the police himself. For 176 of the 225 victims at least one offender is found, about half of them on the same day the murder was committed. Also, about half of the offenders confessed to their crimes when apprehended. There were distinct differences between ethnic Dutch and non-Dutch offenders in this regard. Whereas 63% of ethnically Dutch offenders confessed, only 45% of non-Dutch offenders were willing to do so. Regardless of ethnicity, offenders in the category 'Intimate' were most likely to confess, whereas those involved in one of the 'Criminal' categories were least likely.

A total of 168 offenders had been sentenced to incarceration. There were various reasons why the remaining 62 offenders were not incarcerated, ranging from suicide to their cases not yet being decided. For the 168 offenders who were imprisoned, the average sentence length was 83 months.

There are 70 victims of homicides in the category *Intimate*, which makes this category the largest. Compared with other categories women are mostly found here, among both victims and offenders. In this category, a knife is the most common weapon used and the use of alcohol seems to be prominent here. Within the Intimate category, the relational homicides (i.e. murders between partners or ex-partners) form the biggest part. There is also a large group of children murdered. Of a total of 17 children 14 are killed by their parents.

There are 34 victims in the category *Fights between acquaintances*. Almost all offenders and victims are male. Again, the use of alcohol is very prominent. Many of these homicides are impulsive and for trivial reasons.

Only 8 persons are victim of a *Fight between strangers*. Typically, these are homicides in the public domain, without a clear reason or motive.

Eight women and one boy of eleven are victim of a *Sexual* murder. Offender and victim characteristics vary greatly for these kind of murders.

Homicide in combination with burglary are the most common kind of *Robbery* murders. Among the 23 victims are 5 women.

The division between the three *Criminal* categories are not clear-cut. Some *Liquidations* can also involve drugs trafficking and homicides in the categories *Drug related* or *Criminal other* can be liquidations as well. Only one of the 48 victims is female and all the offenders are male. Most of the homicides in these three categories are committed by ethnic non-Dutch offenders using a gun.