

Summary

Homicide in the Netherlands

1998 and 2002-2004

This report is part of collaboration between NSCR and WODC intended to promote scientific research of homicide. The report has two objectives: to provide insight into the structure, organisation and quality of the Homicide Monitor, a recently completed database for homicide research purposes; and to serve as an update and a further detailing of previous publications by NSCR and WODC on this topic by providing statistics on homicide cases in 1998 and 2002-2004.

The Murder and Homicide Monitor

Different sources, such as Ministry of Justice and police data as well as reports in daily newspapers and weekly magazines, were used to collect data for the Homicide Monitor in respect of all cases classified by the police, Public Prosecution Service and courts as (completed) homicide cases at any time. In addition, interviews were conducted with the respective police investigators and criminal files were reviewed – for the years 1998 and 2003 – as a result of which the Monitor contains more detailed information for those years.

The data is structured according to four ‘units’: the event, the perpetrator, the victim, and the relation between the perpetrator and the victim. In addition, the homicides were classified based on the relation between the perpetrator and the victim, and the circumstances of the homicide. This resulted in six principal categories: Intimate, Argument, Criminal, Robbery-Homicide, Other, and Unknown. These principal categories, in turn, were divided into 17 sub-categories.

The verdict of the court was used as the basis for determining whether an event in the Monitor was in fact a homicide (either a murder or a non-negligent manslaughter) and whether to include this in the statistics presented in this report. If no verdict of the court is (yet) available, the opinion of the Public Prosecution Service or the police was used as the basis. A few technical and legal criteria were also used to decide as to whether or not to include the homicide in the statistics. For example, the homicide must have been committed in the Netherlands, self-defence must be ruled out, attempted homicide does not qualify, etc.

Despite the use of different sources and the careful method of data collection, the Monitor may contain omissions and inaccuracies. This may have different causes: the sources referred to may be incomplete, some missing persons may have been murdered, some deaths may have been unjustly classified as natural deaths, the investigation, prosecution or legal procedures are still going on, or

the interpretation of the data is not univocal. However, there are no indications that any such omissions and inaccuracies are substantial, let alone that they seriously affected the quality of the Monitor.

Homicide in 1998 and 2002-2004

The number of homicides in 1998 and 2002-2004 was approximately 200 per year. Other sources and more recent data suggest a gradual decrease in this number since the mid-1990s. Adjusted for population size, the number of homicides in the Netherlands is comparable to those in other Western European countries. Finland has a higher rate, and the homicide rate in the United States is significantly higher.

Two out of five homicides fit into the Intimate category and more than half of all homicides in this category were between (ex-)partners. Arguments outside the family unit and homicides in the Criminal category each accounted for more than 20% of all homicides. Homicides in the Sexual Homicide category were relatively rare with 2%.

Stabbing weapons and firearms were the most commonly used weapons in homicide cases: four out of five victims died due to gunshot, stab or knife wounds. Firearms were used relatively often in homicides that fit into the Criminal category. Stabbing weapons were used more often in homicides in the Intimate category, although many victims in this category died by strangulation or suffocation.

Homicide rates were relatively higher in the three largest cities: 334 out of the total number of 827 victims during the four reported years were murdered in the police regions of the three largest cities. Approximately half of all homicides were committed indoors. This greatly depended upon the type of homicide: three out of every four homicides in the Intimate category were committed indoors. Most homicides were committed in the municipality where the perpetrator and/or the victim resided. Twenty-five percent of all homicides occurred during the two weekend nights, one-third occurred during the day, and the remaining homicides occurred during one of the five other nights. The differences among the various categories were fairly insignificant in this respect.

With an average age of 31.4, perpetrators were clearly younger than their victims who averaged 36.7 in age. The majority of perpetrators and victims were male, except in the Intimate category where female victims outnumbered male victims. Half of all victims and slightly less than half of all perpetrators were of native Dutch heritage. In relation to the sizes of the various population groups, non-western immigrants – particularly those from the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba – were clearly overrepresented among both perpetrators and victims. In most cases, the perpetrator and the victim were from the same population groups. One exception was the Robbery-Homicide category where three out of four victims were of native Dutch heritage and two out of three perpetrators were immigrants.

No substantial differences were found between perpetrators and victims in respect of their living situations, marital statuses and daily activities, although the percentage of victims who were single or unemployed tended to be lower than for perpetrators. The differences between perpetrators and victims in respect of alcohol consumption were also minor. Among the perpetrators, one out of five was found to be under the influence of alcohol during the homicide versus one out of seven victims. In cases involving drug usage, addiction was a greater factor than being under the influence during the homicide (this was the opposite for alcohol). Drug usage clearly was also a greater factor among perpetrators (15% addicted) than among victims (9% addicted).

In most cases – i.e. in seven out of eight solved homicide cases – the perpetrator and the victim knew each other. Half of all perpetrators and victims who knew each other did so because of family relations.

Seven out of eight victims were found on the same day or, at the latest, on the day after the homicide. Four out of five homicides were solved, i.e. one or more suspects were identified, half of them on the day of the homicide. Slightly more than half of all suspects confessed, with perpetrators of native Dutch heritage confessing slightly more often than immigrants. In Intimate homicide cases, seventy-five percent of all perpetrators confessed.

A number of perpetrators were not prosecuted because they committed suicide. The average term of the imposed unconditional sentence to imprisonment of perpetrators who were actually convicted of homicide was 120 months for murder and 80 months for manslaughter.