

Epidemiology and Forensic Pathology Characteristics of Homicides in Eastern Croatia, 1970-1989

Mladen Marcikiæ, Vedrana Petroveèki¹, Josip Škaviæ¹, Mladen Petroveèki²
Department of Forensic Medicine, Osijek University Hospital and Osijek Branch of the Zagreb University School of Medicine, Osijek; ¹*Department of Forensic Medicine, Zagreb University School of Medicine, Zagreb;* and ²*Department of Clinical Laboratory Diagnosis, Zagreb University Hospital Center, Zagreb, Croatia*

Aim. Analysis of homicides committed in eastern Croatia, in order to define the sociodemographic characteristics of homicide acts and their participants.

Methods. Homicides committed from 1970 to 1989 in the area of eastern Croatia were retrospectively investigated. Data were collected from the records of Osijek and Požega District Courts, and the Department of Forensic Medicine, Osijek University Hospital. During the study, 301 homicides were analyzed according to both assailant and victim.

Results. In a series of 301 homicides, single homicides prevailed (N=275; 91.4%). The lowest rate of homicides was recorded in 1977 and 1978 (1.04 per 100,000 population), and the highest in 1983 (2.65 per 100,000), with a 20-year mean annual rate of 1.72. Men predominated as both assailants (N=221; 91.3%) and victims (N=197; 71.6%). Assailants of both sexes were mostly between the age of 20-40, and victims between the age of 30-45 years. Homicide was most commonly motivated by a quarrel between the assailant and the victim (47.8%). Most of the homicides were committed indoors (67.8%). Sharp force and firearms were most frequently used to commit homicide (42.9% and 23.2%, respectively), followed by blunt force (13.2%), ax (9.1%), punching and kicking (6.2%), asphyxia (4.75%), and immolation (2 cases; 0.7%). In most (63.3%) cases, death occurred instantaneously, i.e., at the moment of homicide. The group of multiple homicides included seven double homicides and one quadruple homicide, as well as eight cases where one victim was attacked by several assailants. Blood alcohol level was determined in 152 offenders immediately after the homicide and in 185 victims on autopsy. The presence of alcohol was recorded in 80.9% of assailants and 72.4% of victims.

Conclusion. Homicides most frequently resulted from a spontaneous violence among persons who knew each other, rather than due to a criminally motivated activity. The perpetrators' aggressiveness could be related to the state of alcohol intoxication.

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Correspondence to:

Dr Mladen Marcikiæ
Department of Forensic Medicine
Osijek University Hospital
Josipa Huttlera 4
31000 Osijek, Croatia