

SOC 3290 Deviance \_\_\_\_\_  
Overheads Lecture 19:

Homicide 1

\* Today we will look at:

- (1) Canadian Homicide Statistics
- (2) Theories of Homicide

**(1) Canadian Homicide Statistics:**

- \* Homicide offences are among the least frequent of all violent offences in Canada. There were 594 homicides in Canada in 2007 (lower than some American cities). This was 12 fewer than the previous year. The 2007 homicide rate of 1.80 homicides per 100,000 was down 3% on the year.
- \* Our homicide rate is about one-third the American figure and in the middle of the pack internationally.
- \* The long-term trend is downward in Canada, homicide having fallen 40% since its peak in 1975. However, this is still much higher than rates in the early to mid 1960's.
- \* The decreases were seen in most provinces, particularly B.C. and Saskatchewan, but Manitoba showed an increase. Quebec's homicide rate was the lowest in that province in over 40 years.
- \* The Western provinces have consistently had the highest homicide rates (between 2-3 per 100,000 vs. a rate of 1-2 east of the Manitoba/Ontario border. Manitoba's rate of 5.22/100,000 was the highest since 1961.

\* The Atlantic provinces tend to have the lowest homicide rates. PEI had no homicides last year, and NL had a rate of 0.6/100,000.

\* Larger metropolitan areas (over 500,000) have higher homicide rates, averaging 2.07/100,000 compared to 1.45 for smaller urban areas. Winnipeg, Edmonton and Calgary led the pack among larger centres. In smaller urban areas, the highest urban homicide rate was in Saskatoon (3.60).

\* Toronto, Calgary and Trois-Rivières each reported their highest homicide rate since the early 1990s. Although almost one in every five homicides in the country occurred in Toronto in 2007, taking population into account, Toronto's rate ranked in the middle of the nine largest cities.

\* Calgary's rate in 2007 was much higher than the average of the previous 10 years, as the homicide rate there has increased sharply since 2003.

\* Quebec City reported having no homicides in 2007, marking the first time since CMA data were first available in 1981 that any metropolitan area with over 500,000 population did not have any homicides.

\* For the past 20 years, Canadian homicide victims have been at equal risk of being shot or stabbed. This held true in 2007 as 190 homicide victims were stabbed and 188 were shot, with each method accounting for about one-third of all homicides.

\* There were 116 victims killed by beating (20%), 50 by strangulation or suffocation (8%) and 16 by a motor

vehicle (3%). This represented the most victims killed by an accused using a motor vehicle since these data were first collected in 1997.

\* Although the overall rate of homicides committed with a firearm has generally been declining since the mid-1970s, the use of handguns has generally been increasing since the mid-1980s. However, the use of rifles or shotguns continues to decline.

\* Of the 188 firearms used to commit homicide in 2007, two-thirds were handguns – 16 more than in 2006. There were also 32 homicides committed with rifles/shotguns and 17 with sawed-off rifles/shotguns in 2007, both down from 2006.

\* Homicides committed with handguns are primarily an urban phenomenon. Within the nation's metropolitan areas, 81% of all firearm homicides were committed with a handgun in 2007, compared to 29% in the rest of Canada. Although Toronto recorded the highest number of handgun homicides, controlling for population, its rate was below those of both Vancouver and Edmonton.

\*Gang-related homicides, which include those of gang members as well as police officers and innocent bystanders, have been increasing since this information was first collected by the Homicide Survey in 1991. In 2007, 117 homicides were reported by police as gang-related, accounting for about one in five homicides. The 2007 total was 16 more than in 2006.

\* Firearms were used more often in gang homicides than in other types of murder. In 2007, 69% of gang-related

homicides were committed with a firearm, compared to about 20% of homicides which did not involve gangs. In total, 43% of all homicides committed with a firearm last year were gang-related.

\* In Saskatchewan, 9 of the 30 homicides in 2007 were gang-related - the highest proportion among the provinces (30%). The Atlantic provinces (8%) and Ontario (14%) reported the lowest proportions of gang-related homicides.

\* Most gang-related homicides occurred within Canada's largest cities. The nine largest metropolitan areas accounted for about 60% of Canada's homicides in 2007, but more than three-quarters of all gang homicides. Edmonton reported the highest rate of any of these large cities.

\* In addition to gang-related homicides, there were 58 homicides in 2007 that were linked to illegal activities of the victim, such as the drug trade and prostitution, up from 40 the previous year. Police reported that 15 prostitutes were killed as a direct result of their profession in 2007, up from an average of 7 per year for the previous decade.

\* In comparison, it is less common to be a victim of homicide as a direct result of legal employment. On average, there have been 17 victims killed each year since 1997 while "on the-job". In 2007, there were eight legal occupation-related homicides, including four police officers. Since reporting began in 1961, an average of 3 police officers have been killed each year.

\* Taxi drivers have one of the highest at-risk homicide rates among legal occupations. Since 1997, an average

of two taxi drivers have been killed each year while on the job, including one in 2007.

\* Most victims knew the person who killed them - in 2007, a relatively small proportion (16%) of solved homicides were committed by a stranger. The rate of homicides committed by a stranger has been fairly stable over the past 30 years.

\* Homicide victims in Canada are almost equally likely to be killed by a family member as they are an acquaintance. In 2007, of all solved homicides, about one-third of victims were killed by an acquaintance and a further one-third by a family member.

\* The rate of spousal homicide has been declining since the mid-1970s. This trend continued in 2007, with 13 fewer spousal homicides than in 2006. The spousal homicide rate is now at its lowest point since the mid-1960s.

\* Women continue to be about 4 times more likely to be victims of spousal homicide than men. In 2007, there were 51 women and 13 men killed by a current or former spouse. For both men and women, more victims were killed by a common-law spouse than by a legally-married spouse in 2007.

\* Women also continue to be at greater risk than men of being killed by a former spouse. In 2007, 11 of the 51 female spousal victims were killed by a separated or divorced spouse, compared to none of the male victims. In addition to the 65 spousal homicides, there were 16 homicides committed by a current or former boyfriend/girlfriend or intimate partner in 2007, similar to numbers seen in previous years.

\* As has been the case historically, males accounted for about three-quarters of homicide victims and 9 in 10 accused persons in 2007. Male victims and accused tend to be younger than female victims and accused. In 2007, the median age of male victims was 29.5, compared to 35.5 for female victims. The median age of males accused of homicide was 24 compared to 27 for females accused of homicide.

\* Males accused of homicide have been getting younger in recent years. The median age of males accused of homicide was down from 29 in 2002 to 24 in 2007, while the age of accused females has remained about the same.

\* There were 74 youth aged 12 to 17 accused of homicide in 2007, 11 fewer than in 2006. Despite recent fluctuations, the rate of youth accused of homicide has remained relatively stable over the past 30 years. The 2006 rate of youth accused (3.29 per 100,000 youth) was the highest since recording began in 1961. Even though the 2007 rate was lower, it was still the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest ever recorded.

\* Compared to adults, a higher proportion of homicides involving youth were gang-related or were incidents where more than one person was accused of committing the crime. Among incidents with an accused youth, 57% involved multiple accused compared to 17% where an adult was accused. Similarly, 32% of incidents with a youth accused involved gangs compared to 11% of incidents with an adult accused.

\* Homicides committed by youth in 2007 also differed from those committed by adults in the method used. While the most common method employed by a youth to commit homicide was a physical beating (38%),

shootings were the most common method used by adults (37%).

## **(2) Why do people kill?**

\* Three kinds of theory attempt to explain homicide:

- (1) *Biogenic*
- (2) *Psychogenic*
- (3) *Sociogenic*

(1) *Biogenic* theories: ethological & genetic approaches:

*Ethological*: humans, like other animals, have killer instinct. Yet, as we suddenly developed artificial weapons, no inhibiting instinct stops us (can't explain why some murder rather than others)

*Genetic*: "killer genes"/XYY chromosome (empirical problems)

(2) *Psychogenic* theories: psychoanalytic theory & frustration-aggression:

*Psychoanalytic*: Poor ego development allows desires & thanatos (the "death instinct") comprising the "id" to rule (untestable/ applicable to only a few killers)

*Frustration-Aggression*: goal frustration increases the odds of aggression (some limited empirical support)

(3) *Sociogenic* theories:

*External constraint* theory: whether frustrated people commit homicide or suicide depends on: (i) if they experience weak or strong external constraints; & (ii) type of punishment experienced during socialization (physical vs. psychological).  
Some empirical support for this approach

*Subculture of violence* theory: socialization into a violent model of behavior & value system by family/peers (problem is other factors are associated more with violence, such as poverty)

*Victim-offender precipitation*: the victim either provokes or gets into an escalating dispute with the offender to save face

*Structural* theories: feminist arguments about patriarchal violence

\* Next class: victims of homicide



