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Contents

1 Finnish Homicide Monitoring System	1
2 Temporal and Regional Patterns	2
3 Before the Offence	6
4 Homicide Patterns	7
5 Victim and Offender Characteristics	10
6 After the Offence: Investigation and Sentencing	13
Literature	15
Appendix The Basics of Finnish Homicide Monitoring System	16

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Homicide in Finland, 2002–2006

A Description Based on the Finnish Homicide Monitoring System (FHMS)

Summary

- In 2006, the Finnish Police reported 138 homicides. The crime rate was 2.6 victims per 100,000 population.
- From the 1970s till the end of the 1990s, the homicide rate remained stable (about 3 per 100,000 population), but has decreased during the last five years.
- The majority of Finnish homicides occur in the context of drinking quarrels between unemployed, middle-aged male alcoholics. During the period 2002–2006, in 71% of all homicides all persons involved were intoxicated. In 85% of the crimes at least one of the persons involved was intoxicated.
- In 2002–2006, 58% of male homicide offenders had prior convictions for violent crime and 37% had been in prison prior to the homicide.
- Finnish homicide is regionally patterned: the northern and eastern parts of the country have higher homicide rates than the other regions. During the last decade, the gap has widened. Thus the overall drop in homicide occurrence reflects the decrease of lethal violence in the southern and western regions.
- The Finnish homicide rate is one of the highest in the European Union. This is largely explained by the alcohol and drinking group related homicides of the socially marginalized men. The homicide rates of other socio-economic groups are roughly the same as in the other Scandinavian countries.
- In 2002, Finland launched a national homicide monitoring system (FHMS) collecting detailed information about all homicides. This research brief is the first English-language report based on the FHMS.

1 Finnish Homicide Monitoring System

For decades, the Finnish homicide rate has been higher than the corresponding rate in other Nordic Countries. Every year, about three Finns per 100,000 are killed by interpersonal violence. It is, therefore, natural that homicide research has remained among the top priorities of Finnish criminology.

Note

- This report is based on research conducted by the National Research Institute of Legal Policy, Finland (NRILP).
- FHMS is a joint project of the NRILP, the Finnish Police College and the Police Department of the Ministry of the Interior.

In the 1990s, the National Research Institute of Legal Policy (NRILP) initiated a series of research projects on homicide, seeking to describe the patterns and correlates of Finnish homicide in detail. These studies used project-specific research materials and depended on the information which was originally collected by the police for the purpose of solving the offences. In the course of these studies (Kivivuori 1999; Lehti 2001), a large dataset covering the years 1960–74, 1988, 1996 and 1998–2000 was created. However, it was recognized early on that an in-depth analysis of homicide could not rely on the secondary use of data collected primarily for the purpose of solving cases. Instead, we needed a data source whose information content would be defined by the researchers.

Consequently, the NRILP made an initiative to create a national homicide monitoring system. After the approximately two-year-long negotiation and planning phase, the Finnish Homicide Monitoring System (FHMS) was launched in June 2002. While the NRILP is responsible for the continuous reporting of the descriptive results, the FHMS is fundamentally based on cooperation between the research unit of the Finnish Police College and the Police Department of the Ministry of the Interior. The basic features and operation of the FHMS are described in the Appendix at the end of this research brief.

The data contents of the system reflect an amalgamation of two research traditions.¹ First, the instrument reflects the tradition of empirical criminological research in the style of Marvin Wolfgang's classic *Patterns of Criminal Homicide* (1958). This tradition describes how lethal violence is located in the socio-demographic structure of society as well as in the recurring temporal and spatial dimensions and rhythms of everyday life. In Finland, the central role of alcohol in criminal violence is often analysed from this perspective. Good databases have enabled historical analyses of many of these factors. Much of the work using pre-FHMS datasets reflects this tradition, examining both the change and the continuities behind superficial changes within the homicide scene (see, for example Lehti & Kivivuori 2003; Kivivuori & Lehti 2006; Savolainen et al. 2008).

Second, the FHMS instrument has aspects which reflect the research interests of forensic psychology. These describe in greater detail the behaviour of the offender before, during and after the offence. So far the publications using the FHMS proper have been mainly published in Finnish, and have reflected the socio-demographic tradition. The forensic psychological utilisation has been waiting for more data to accumulate.

Apart from these scientific points of departure, the FHMS taps other aspects as well. Some questions relate to the putative "warning signs" preceding the offence; the idea is to know more about the prior criminal justice contacts of the victim and the offender. Additionally, external data on punishments are routinely incorporated into the system by the NRILP.

In this research brief, we first describe the basic historical trends and geographical patterns of Finnish homicide (section 2). Sections 3 to 6 are based on the Finnish Homicide Monitoring System. Section 3 probes the antecedents of the homicidal incident: offender's and victim's criminal records, the prior interaction of the participants, and the possible preceding "warning signs". In section 4, we describe certain core patterns of Finnish homicides. Section 5 focuses on the personal characteristics of victims and offenders. The final section 6 takes a brief look at what happens after the offence: how homicides become known to the police, how fast the prime suspect is identified, and what kind of punishment the offender receives.

2 Temporal and Regional Patterns

2.1 Historical trends. An unbroken series of data of the annual number of victims of voluntary homicides is available in Finland from the mid-1750s onwards. This unique data was collected till 1808 by the Swedish Statistical Bureau and later by the statistical authorities of Finland. The estimated number of missing cases² was higher in the 18th and early 19th century than today, but the data should be fairly comparable with the corresponding data from other European countries during the same period.

During the last two centuries, homicide rates have been considerably higher and more volatile in Finland than in the other Western European and Nordic Countries. Back in the 18th century, Finnish homicide rate was by and large on a par with other Western European nations, including the rest of the Nordic area. In the 19th century, however, the Finnish trend began to diverge. In Finland the period of industrialization was accompanied by a more or less permanent increase in violent crime, while elsewhere in Western Europe homicide rates decreased (Lehti 2001).

¹ The FHMS instrument was created by Janne Kivivuori and Martti Lehti from the National Research Institute of Legal Policy and Pekka Santtila from the research unit of the Police College. Manne Laukkanen from the College participated in the initial stages of the system.

² In the early part of the series the percentage of missing cases was 20–30%. Since then, the "dark number" has been estimated at 10–15%.

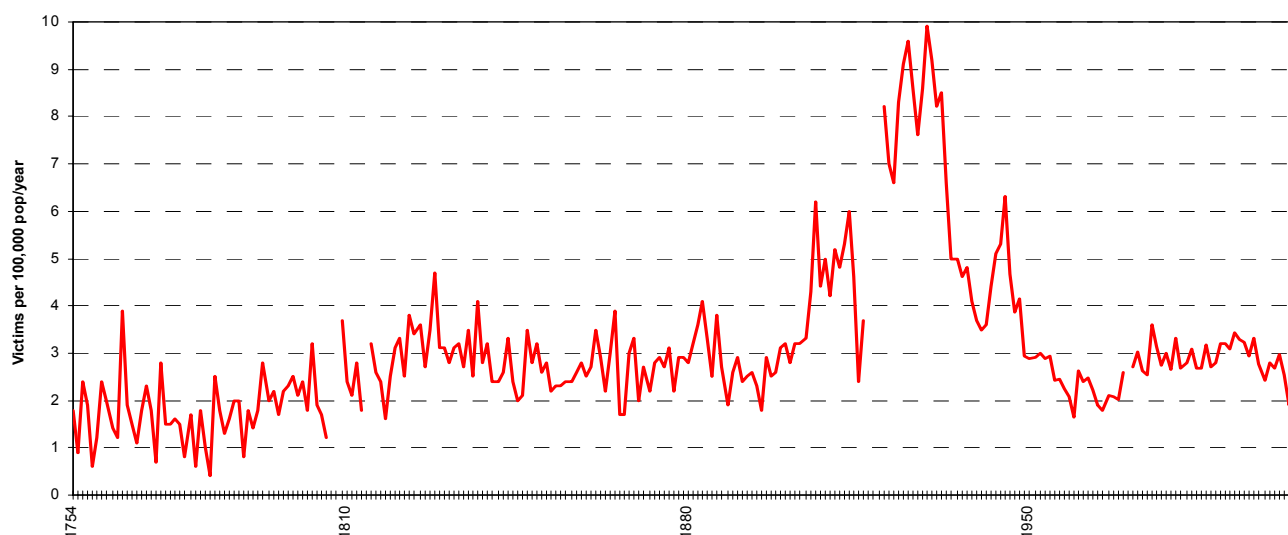


Figure 1 Homicide death rate in Finland from 1754 to 2005 (infanticides, as well as the war and revolution years of 1808 and 1917–1919 are excluded from the figures; Verkko 1948; Statistics Finland).

The most violent period in Finnish history was from 1905 till the early 1930s, when the homicide death rate was three times higher than today. Also the late 1940s, the period following the Second World War, was characterized by exceptionally high homicide rates. After the year 1947, when peacetime conditions and sovereignty³ returned, homicide rates started to fall steadily. The decreasing trend came to an abrupt end in 1969 as the supply of alcohol was liberalized after decades of strict regulation. 17,000 grocery stores received the right to

sell beer. This policy change, accompanied by a large-scale and rapid socio-economic transformation and massive internal migration from rural to urban areas, had an immediate impact on violent crime statistics (Kivivuori 2002).

After the mid-1970s, the homicide rate has remained fairly stable with approximately three homicides a year per 100,000 population. The rate is double or triple compared with the other Western European and Nordic Countries.

Table 1 Homicide (excl. infanticide) offenders and victims by sex in Finland in 1748–2003 (sources: Viljanen 1983; Koskivirta 2001; Ylikangas 1976; Statistics Finland)

Years	GHR	Offenders (sentenced persons)					Years	Victims				
		Male		Female		N		Male		Female		N
		%	rate	%	rate			%	rate	%	rate	
1748-1807	4.4	88.1	7.2	11.9	0.9	193	1754-1789	74.3	2.5	25.7	0.8	335
1789-1825	6.9	94.6	24.6	5.4	1.3	447	1790-1849 ^a	85.9	4.8	14.1	0.7	1,807
1891-1899	2.5	90.0	4.0	10.0	0.4	488	1850-1890	86.8	4.9	13.2	0.7	2,140
1900-1904	3.1	91.0	4.9	9.0	0.5	356	1891-1899	83.3	4.2	16.7	0.8	574
1905-1913	5.0	94.7	8.3	5.3	0.4	1,134	1900-1904	88.1	5.6	11.9	0.7	438
1920-1932	8.4	97.0	16.9	3.0	0.5	3,742	1905-1913	86.6	8.8	13.4	1.3	1,393
1933-1939	4.8	96.3	10.2	3.7	0.4	1,306	1920-1932	91.4	16.8	8.6	1.5	3,896
1940-1944	4.4	95.6	10.0	4.4	0.4	930	1933-1930	81.3	8.6	18.7	1.9	1,295
1945-1948	4.8	96.3	12.7	3.7	0.4	966	1940-1944	81.5	7.3	18.5	1.6	859
1949-1959	2.6	95.2	4.5	4.8	0.2	1,039	1945-1948	82.6	8.3	17.4	1.4	54
1960-1969	2.2	94.6	3.5	5.4	0.2	818	1949-1959	71.0	3.9	29.0	1.4	1,157
1970-1979	2.9	92.5	4.9	7.5	0.4	1,221	1960-1969	70.3	3.2	29.7	1.3	1,006
1980-1989	2.9	92.3	4.8	7.7	0.4	1,239	1970-1979	74.4	4.4	25.6	1.4	1,222
1990-1999	3.0	90.1	5.3	9.9	0.6	1,478	1980-1989	70.3	4.2	29.7	1.7	1,413
							1990-1999	71.1	4.4	28.9	1.7	1,550

^a The figures of 1807, 1808 and 1814 are missing.

³ During the immediate post-war years, Finland was closely monitored by the Allied Control Commission.

Due to the exceptionally good data sources, we can also track the long-term changes in the demographic patterns of homicide. Table 1 summarizes some of these changes.

The sex division of offenders has been very stable during the last two centuries. In 90 to 95 percent of the cases, offender is a man. The female homicide rate (when infanticides are excluded) has remained constant for at least a hundred years. In other words, the changes in the general homicide rate tend to reflect changes in male violence. The same applies to short-term variations in homicide death rate, where fluctuations correspond, to a large extent, to changes in male death rate. However, one substantial long-term change can be observed: both the proportion of female victims and the female death rate have increased since the end of the 19th century. Crime waves of the early 20th century tripled the male death rate and doubled the female death rate, but while the aforementioned decreased by 80 percent between the end of the 1920s and the end of the 1960s, the female rate remained on the high level of the 1910s and 1920s.

The age-structure of male homicide offenders has changed radically during the last two centuries. In the long-run the crime rates of the youngest age-groups have decreased, and those of the middle-aged men increased. The trend has not been continuous but has been interrupted by occasional bursts of high criminality among the very young age-groups of 15 to 29-year-old men. These age groups have been responsible for all Finnish "homicide waves" of the 19th and 20th centuries. The decrease in homicide rates after the Second World War was also centred in these age-groups. The Finnish experience suggests that the homicide age-crime curve is subject to relatively extensive socio-historical variation.

The victim-offender relationship manifests both stable and changing aspects. In all periods, non-kin homicides have been more prevalent than homicides between intimate partners and family members. However, as exemplified in Figure 2, the category of non-kin homicides is responsible for the big changes in the homicide rate. This category includes homicides between friends and acquaintances. Periods of high crime rate have been dominated by this kind of violence.

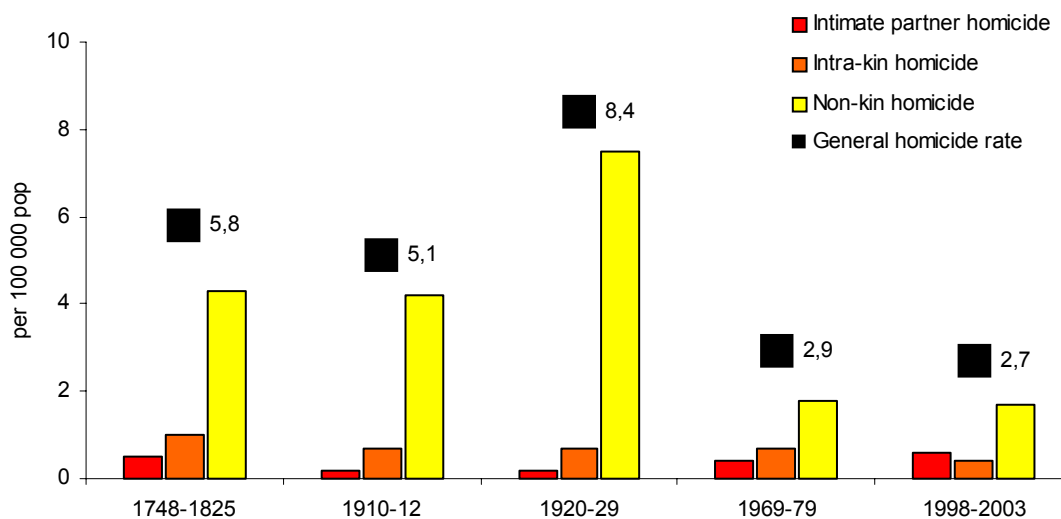


Figure 2 Homicide rate by victim-offender relationship in Finland, 1748–2003 (For detailed source references, see Savolainen et al. 2008.)

2.2 Homicide trend in recent decades. The annual number of homicides⁴ has been steadily decreasing since the mid-1990s. In the first half of the decade the annual average was 177 crimes, in the latter half 171 crimes, and in 2000–2006 157 crimes.

In the 1990s, the average homicide rate per 100,000 population was 3.4, and in 2000–2006, 3.0.

2.3 Basic geographical patterns. Historically homicide rates have been higher in the northern and eastern parts of the country than in the western and southern parts. During the last decade, the gap has widened. The decrease in the number of crimes and in the crime rate has concentrated mainly in the southern and western provinces, while at the same time homicide rates in Northern and Eastern Finland have remained stable or even increased.

⁴ These and later figures include the following crimes: murder, voluntary manslaughter, voluntary manslaughter under mitigating circumstances, infanticide, and involuntary manslaughter committed in the context of voluntary assault.

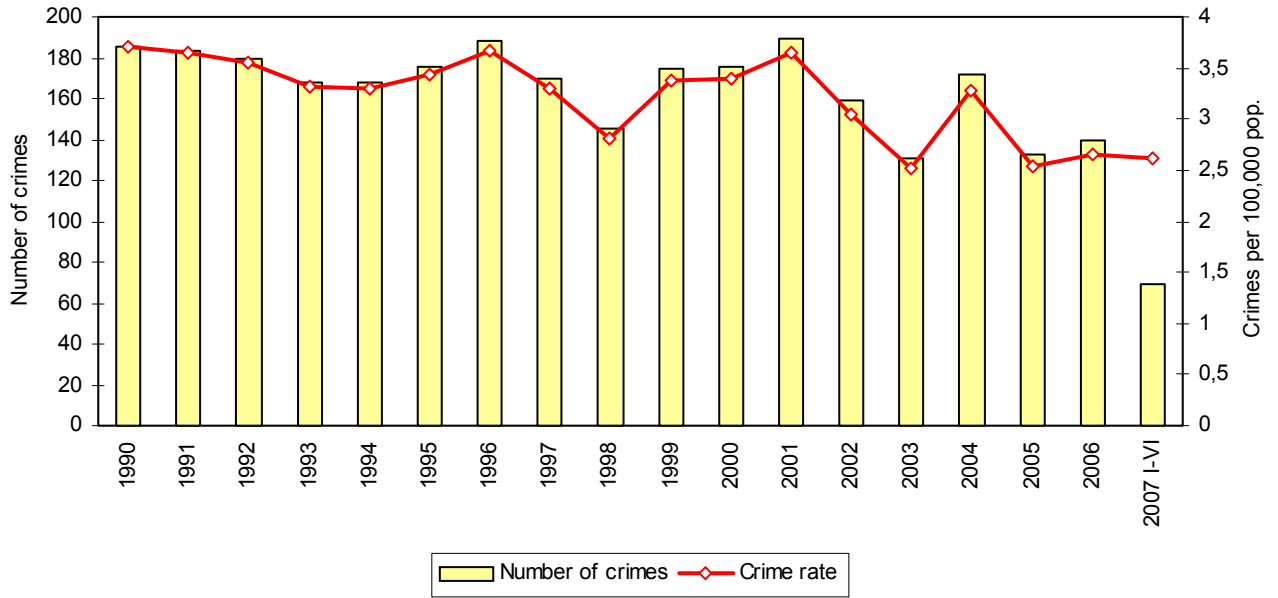


Figure 3 Finnish homicide rate and number of crimes, 1990–2007

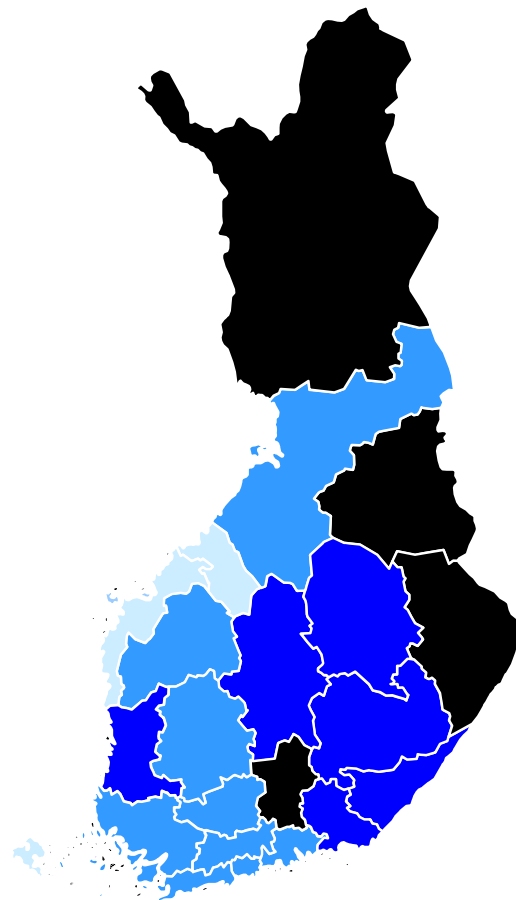


Figure 4 Homicide rate, Finland 2002–2006, by region (NUTS3). The darker the colour, the higher the homicide rate.

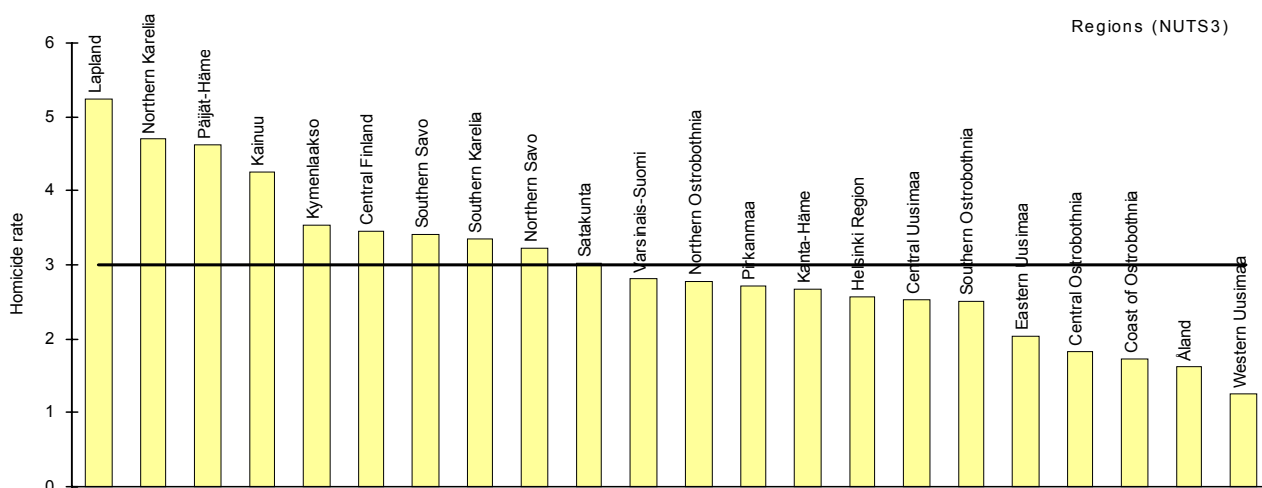


Figure 5 Average homicide rate in Finnish regions (NUTS3), 2000–2006.⁵

Figure 5 shows the average annual homicide rates in the provinces of Finland (NUTS3) in 2000–2006. The rates were the highest in Lapland (5.3), Northern Karelia (4.7), Päijät-Häme (4.4) and Kainuu (4.2). With the exception of Päijät-Häme, all these provinces are located in the relatively deprived areas of Northern and Eastern Finland, characterised by active internal migration to other parts of the country. In Figure 4, the province of Päijät-Häme can be identified as the black area in the south-east.

The lowest homicide rates are found in the southern and western coastal provinces (Western Uusimaa, 1.3; Åland, 1.6; Coast of Ostrobothnia, 1.7). Also in the Helsinki Region, the rate was below the national average (2.6 versus 3.0). Generally, provinces with the largest cities have below-average homicide rates.

3 Before the Offence

The data in this and all the following sections are based on homicides in FHMS committed between 1 June 2002 and 31 December 2006. This section contains information about prior criminality of the offender, and about behaviour that could have indicated that a violent crime was about to unfold.

The FHMS contains a series of questions probing pre-crime "warning signs". Some of these questions pertain to the interaction between the participants, while others examine victim's and offender's contacts with criminal justice system. Of course, such data cannot be converted to risk ratios because we look retrospectively to the past from the vantage point of a homicide that took place.

3.1 Prior crimes of offender and victim. The majority of male homicide offenders are violent crime recidivists. In the observed period, 57 per cent of male offenders had prior sentences for violent crimes (assaults, homicides, attempted homicides); one third (37%) had been in prison at least once.

Collecting information on the prior criminality of homicide victims has proven to be quite difficult: their criminal records are usually erased before the data can be entered into the FHMS. In the study period, information was available only on about a half of the victims. The findings should thus be interpreted with caution. However, the sample of victims whose information is available is formed randomly⁶ and should be fairly representative. According to this data (Table 2), a large proportion of adult male victims have a history of violent crime, and many of them have been in prison as well.

Table 2 Prior criminality of male homicide participants, 2002–2006, %. Bracketed figures are based on limited data.

	Offenders (N=475)	Adult ^a victims (N=386)
Penal Code Convictions in 1999-2006 (all types of sentences)	69.3	50.6
Criminal record (prior prison sentences)	61.8	[70.4] ^b
Violent crime convictions	57.5	[40.0] ^c
Been in prison	37.3	[40.0] ^d

a) Victims aged 15 or older. b) Missing data: 44% of victims. c) Missing data: 36% of victims. d) Missing data: 64% of victims.

When compared with men, fewer female offenders and adult victims had a history of prior criminality. Only 28% of female offenders and 19%⁷ of adult female victims had earlier violent crime convictions. The percentage of those with prior prison sentences was 12% among female offenders and 7%⁸ among adult female victims.

⁵ The Helsinki Region, Central Uusimaa and Western Uusimaa are here separated from the very large NUTS3 region of Uusimaa. They technically form a single NUTS3 area.

⁶ These victims were killed in the second half of each year.

⁷ & ⁸ Based on data of victims of whom information was available.

3.2 Prior violent interaction between victim and offender. In a substantial proportion of all homicides, there had been prior violent interactions between the offender and the victim. The percentages shown in Figure 6 may even seem surprisingly low, at least with respect to prior offender violence against the victim. Based on FHMS reports, the figures reflect the cases in which the investigating police have ascertained the existence of prior violent interactions. On the other hand, a rather significant segment of homicides are preceded by victim violence or threats toward the offender.

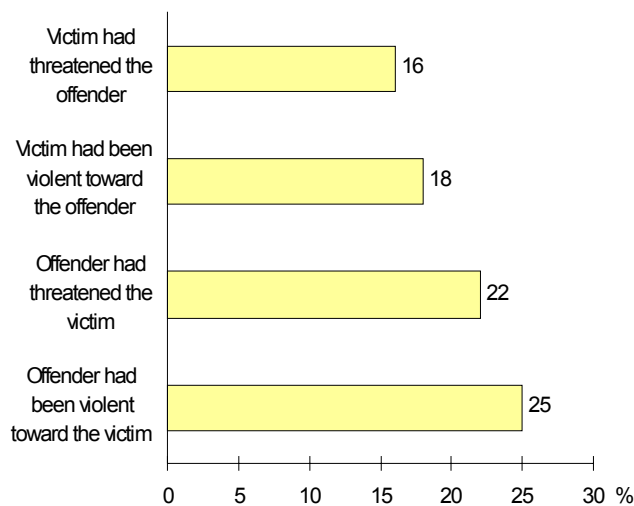


Figure 6 Prior violent interaction between homicide victims and their offenders known to the investigating police, 2002–2006 (N=572).

3.3 Other pre-crime "warning signs". The FHMS also contains data about the contacts of the victim with the criminal justice system. These and two other possible "warning signs" are shown in Figure 7. The findings indicate that quite a small number of homicides are related to breaches of restraining order or to situations where restraining order has been sought by the victim. In 5 per cent of the cases, the victim had contacted the police due to offender violence. This means that annually approximately seven or eight people who have sought help from the police, are subsequently killed.

If we combine the data on prior violent interactions, criminal justice contacts and other "warning signs", 54 per cent of the homicides of the period manifested at least one of the said "signs"; in cases with available data, the percentage was as high as 67 per cent.

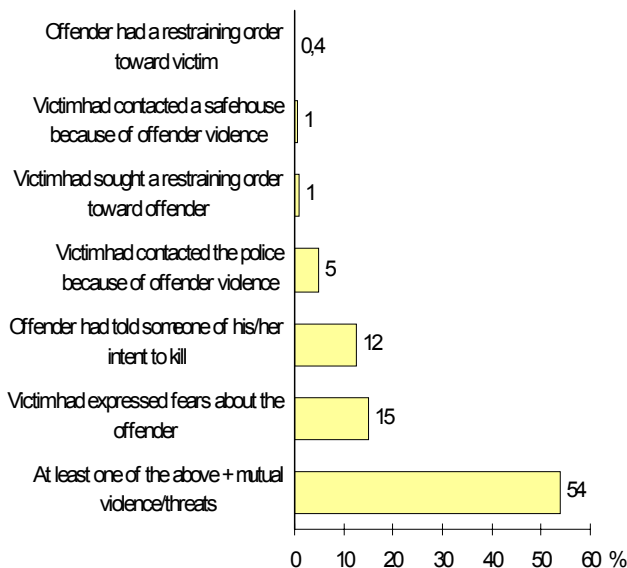


Figure 7 Prior criminal justice contacts of the homicide victims, and other potential "warning signs" of serious violence in homicides, 2002–2006 (N=572).

4 Homicide Patterns

In the majority of homicide incidents⁹ (80%) of the period, there was only one offender and one victim. In 3 per cent of the cases, there were multiple victims, and in 15 per cent, multiple offenders.¹⁰ The highest number of fatalities in a single incident was six¹¹.

4.1 Sex composition of homicide. 70 per cent of the homicide victims were males and 30 per cent females. The offender population was dominated by males: 90 per cent males versus 10 per cent females. In the majority of homicides (62%), both parties were male. The second most prevalent type involved a male offender killing a female victim. Less than one in ten homicides had a female offender killing a male victim, and only 2 per cent were female-to-female cases. This last category is dominated by mothers killing their young children.

⁹ Homicide incident = situation where one or more people are killed at the same time and in the same situation; homicide = each killed victim is a separate homicide.

¹⁰ N=545; in 2% of the incidents the number of offenders was unknown, in all these cases there was only one victim.

¹¹ In October 2002, a young male detonated an explosive device in a shopping mall. The six random victims of this case are included in the figures of this report.

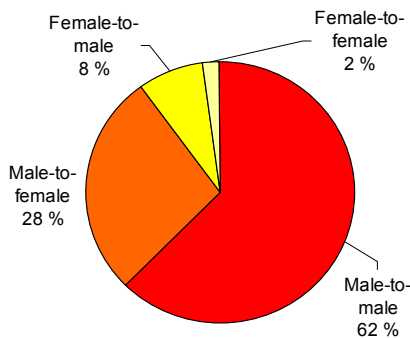


Figure 8 Sex composition of homicides in Finland, 2002–2006 (incl. only solved cases; N=560).

4.2 Weapons and types of violence. In the homicides of 2002–2006, the most common method of killing was stabbing with a sharp instrument. The most common weapon used was a kitchen knife (method of killing in 25% of the cases).

Male offenders are more likely to assault their victims without weapons, by hitting, kicking, strangling, etc. They are also more likely to use firearms and blunt instruments. Female offenders often opt for sharp instruments, fire, poison or a soft instrument. However, it needs to be underscored that also the majority of homicides involving poison and fire are committed by men. The use of a soft instrument is the sole case in which females outnumber males in absolute numbers.

Table 3 Homicide instrument by offender sex, 2002–2006 (%).

	All crimes (N=572)	Male offenders (N = 503)	Female offenders (N = 57)
Sharp instrument	39.7	39.4	49.1
Assault without weapon	23.3	24.7	10.5
Firearm	15.4	16.5	7.0
of these handgun	5.9	6.4	1.8
Blunt instrument	8.0	8.4	1.8
Fire	3.0	2.4	8.8
Poison	2.1	1.4	7.0
Soft instrument	0.7	0.0	7.0
Other	6.4	6.4	7.0
Unknown	1.4	0.8	1.8
All	100.0	100.0	100.0

In 23 per cent of the crimes, death was caused by battering or strangling with bare hands or feet without any weapon. Firearm homicides made up 15 per cent of the total.

The number of wounds inflicted with a sharp instrument ranged from one to 150. One third of the victims (33%) killed with a sharp instrument were killed by a single stroke. Another third of the victims in this category were knifed 2–9 times, while the final third were hit at least 10 times. Female victims killed with a sharp instrument were slightly more likely to suffer multiple wounds than their male counterparts.

Number of gunshot wounds ranged from one to nine. Of the victims of gun violence, 71 per cent died due to a single shot while the rest were shot at least twice.

4.3 Crime location. During the recent decades, Finnish homicide has "moved indoors", from public and semi-public places to private apartments (Kivivuori 2001, 31). The FHMS describes the present scene: 72 per cent of the homicide victims were killed in private apartments, 42 per cent in their own homes.

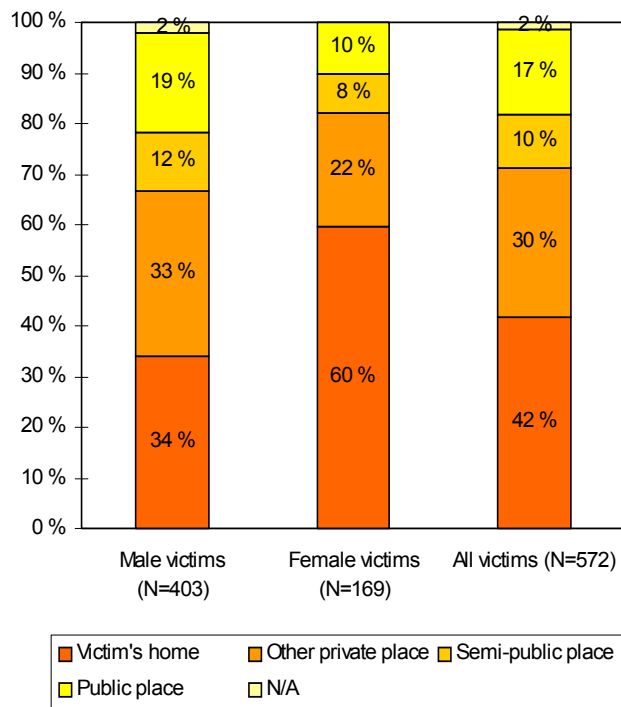


Figure 9 Crime location in homicides, 2002–2006 (victim-based count).

Although the crimes tended to be linked to drinking situations, only a few (5%) were committed in public licensed premises such as bars, pubs or restaurants. The number of homicides connected with street violence was small as well (6%). The majority (60%) of female homicide victims were killed in their own homes. The corresponding percentage of male victims was 34 per cent.

4.4 Alcohol and drugs. Finnish homicides are closely related to alcohol consumption, intoxication and drinking situations. This section describes how many of the offenders and victims were under the influence of various substances during the homicide.

Table 4 summarizes the presence of alcohol separately for offender and victim populations. All adult offender and victim categories were more likely to have been under the influence of alcohol than not, men even more so than women. The largest segment of sober participants can be found among adult female homicide victims, 39 per cent of whom were sober at the time of the act. All child victims (under 15 years of age) killed during the studied period were sober.

Table 4 Percentage of offenders and adult victims under the influence of alcohol during the homicide, 2002–2006.

	All offenders (N=528)	Male offenders (N=475)	Female offenders (N=53)
Alcohol influence	80	82	68
Sober	16	15	28
N/A	3	3	4
	99	100	100

	All victims (N=541)	Male victims (N=386)	Female victims (N=155)
Alcohol influence	78	85	60
Sober	20	12	39
N/A	2	3	1
	100	100	100

The above table uses separate offender and victim counts. Figure 10 below combines participants' intoxication statuses. In 2002–2006, in an overwhelming majority of cases (71%) both the offender and the victim were under the influence of alcohol. In 14 per cent of the cases, only one party was drunk. In 11 per cent of the crimes, both parties were sober.

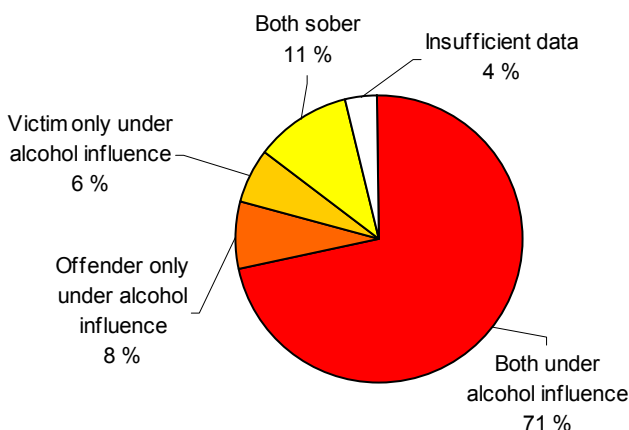


Figure 10 Offender's and victim's alcohol intoxication in homicides, 2002–2006 (victim-based count; crimes against adults only; N=541).

Drugs and other non-alcoholic intoxicants play only a minor part in Finnish homicides. In 2002–2006, 4 per cent of male homicide offenders and none of female offenders were under the influence of hard drugs, while 18 per cent of male offenders and 21 per cent of female offenders were under the combined influence of alcohol and psychosomatic drugs. Corresponding percentages for adult male victims were 4 per cent and 10 per cent, and for adult female victims 3 per cent and 10 per cent respectively.

4.5 Motives. One of the lessons learnt during the first years of the FHMS is that classifying the motive of homicide is difficult. The main problem is that it is difficult to place a homicide in a single motive category. Thus, the following figures indicate the presence of the said motive. The categories enumerated are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The most common type of homicide in 2002–2006 was a drinking quarrel. In these cases, the violence did not usually have any clear motive, but was considered more or less "alcohol related". Drinking quarrels made up one fourth of the crimes of the period. Also domestic quarrels (15%), and crimes motivated by jealousy (14%) were usually closely linked to situations where the persons involved had been drinking together and were heavily intoxicated.

Table 5 Presence of motives in Finnish homicides, 2002–2006. Classification is not mutually exclusive.

Motive	%	N
Drinking quarrel	24.7	141
Domestic quarrel	15.2	87
Jealousy	13.8	79
Mental disorder	13.6	78
Economic	12.2	70
Debt-related	5.4	31
Robbery	4.2	24
Burglary	1.4	8
Revenge	12.1	69
Revenge, crime-related	2.8	16
Ending a violent relationship	10.3	59
Honour-related	8.4	48
Hate crime	1.7	10
Homosexual hate crime	1.7	10
Racist hate crime	0.0	0
Organized crime related	1.0	6
Eliminating a witness	0.9	5
Contract killing	0.3	2
Rape	0.3	2
N		572

Economic gain was at least a partial motivator in 12 per cent of the examined homicides; murder-robberies comprised 4 per cent of the crimes. Organized crime related homicides (1%) were rare in both number and frequency, and were mostly connected with killings between Finnish motorcycle gangs.

4.6 Victim-offender relationship. The majority of victims were killed by their acquaintances, relatives or spouses. In 12 per cent of the homicides, the offender and the victim were strangers to each other.

Children under 15 years of age were usually killed by their parents. In the period, there were 29 under 15-year-old homicide victims in Finland; 17 (59%) were killed by their mother, 10 (34%) by their father, one (3%) by a brother, and one (3%) by a stranger.

The majority of adult female homicide victims were killed by a sexual partner. 68 per cent of female victims over 15 years of age were killed by a spouse, boyfriend or ex-partner (58% by their current partner and 11% by ex-partner), 11 per cent by a family member or near relative, 17 per cent by an acquaintance, and 4 per cent by a stranger.

The majority of adult male victims were killed by an acquaintance (66%), 16 per cent by a stranger, 7 per cent by a family member or near relative, and 5 per cent by a spouse, girlfriend or ex-partner.

Male offenders killed most often friends and acquaintances (54%) or sexual partners (22%). Strangers made up 12 per cent of their victims, near relatives (excl. children) 7 per cent, and own children 2 per cent.

4.7 Homicides and other crime. In one out of ten homicide incidents (10%), the homicide occurs in the context of some other crime (or vice versa). This contextual crime refers to a crime which takes place during the commission of another crime, and thus revenges of past crimes are not included in the data. Moreover, the data is based on a list of core offences: robbery, theft, arson, breaking and entering, rape, and bomb planting. The prevalence of homicides which took place in the immediate context of these offences is shown in Figure 13.

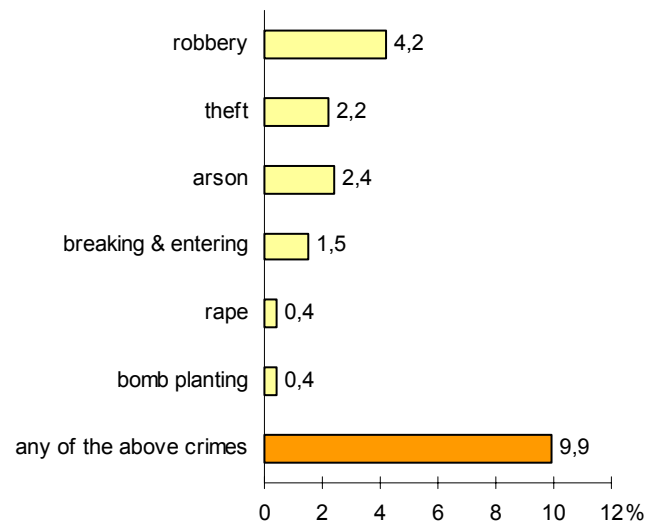


Figure 13 The percentage of homicides taking place in the immediate context of another crime type, 2002–2006 (by homicide incident; N=545).

Male homicide offenders are slightly more likely to commit the homicide in the context or during the commission of some other crime. From the victim point of view, the percentages are also quite similar for males and females. Two female victims (1.2%) were killed in the context of rape.

5 Offender and Victim Characteristics

5.1 Age and sex. Above, we described the sex distribution of offender and victim populations, as well as the sex composition of homicide. In this section, the age distributions of male and female offenders are compared.

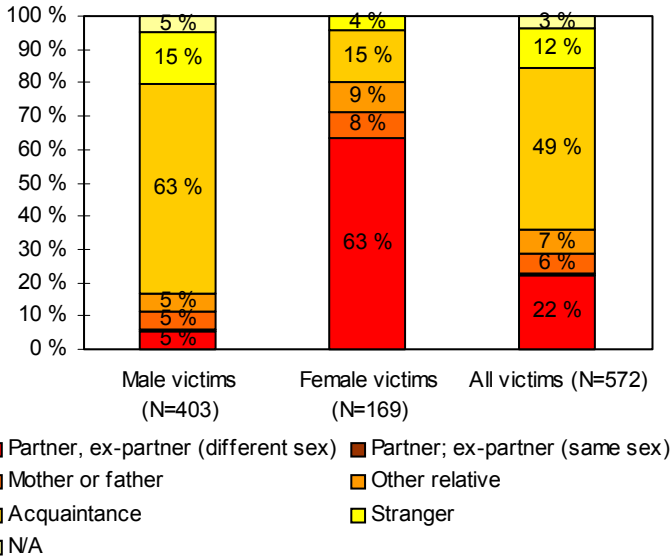


Figure 11 Victim-offender relationship in homicides, 2002–2006 (victim-based count).

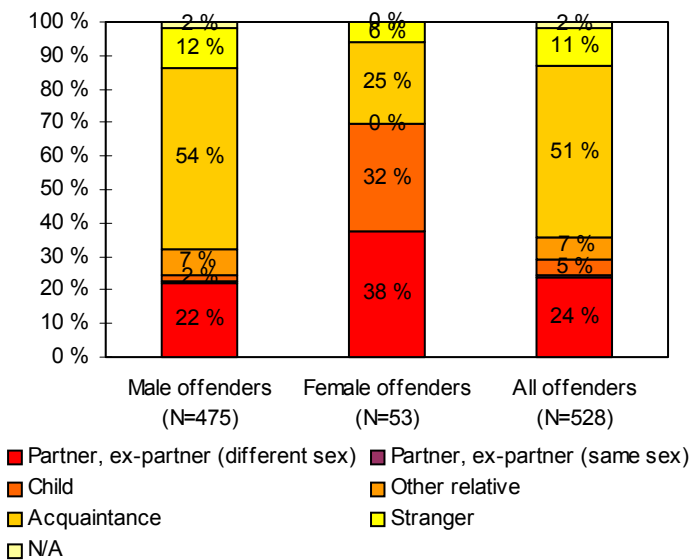


Figure 12 Victim-offender relationship in homicides, 2002–2006 (offender-based count).

The victims of female homicide offenders were mostly their sexual partners (38%) or children (32%). Acquaintances made up 25 per cent of the victims, strangers 6 per cent.

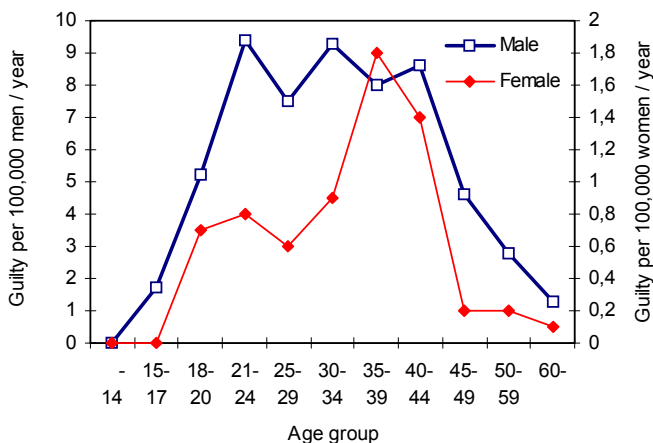


Figure 14 Homicide offending rate by age and sex in 2003-2005.

In 2002-2006, the average age of male offenders was 37.5 and median-age 36; female offenders were slightly older with an average age of 38.8 and median-age of 38. Crime rates were the highest among the 21-24-year-old and 30-34-year-old men, and 35-39-year-old women.

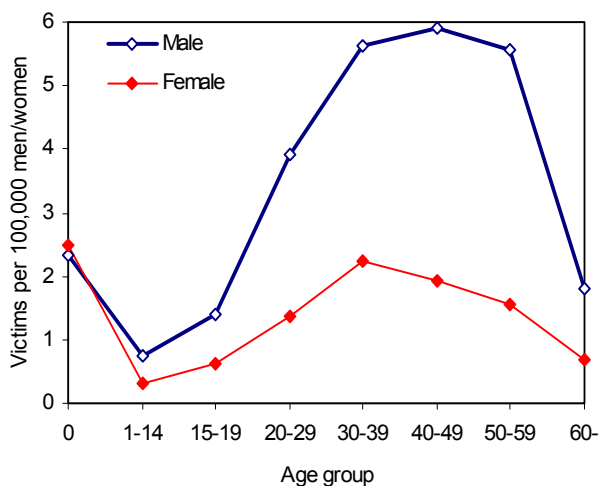


Figure 15 Homicide victimisation rate by age and sex in 2003-2005.

Homicide mortality was at its highest among the 40-49-year-old men and 30-39-year-old women. The average age of male victims was 41.8 (median-age 43) and female victims 42.7 (median-age 43). Among the working-age population, men's mortality rate was three times higher than women's.

5.2 Nationality. In Finland, homicides are mainly crimes of the native population. During the observation period, 93 per cent of offenders and 94 per cent of victims were native Finnish citizens. However, this is partly due to the fact that there are no large immigrant communities in the country. The average homicide rate and homicide mortality rate of immigrants in Finland were about twice as high as those of the native citizens. There were also substantial differences between the different immigrant groups.

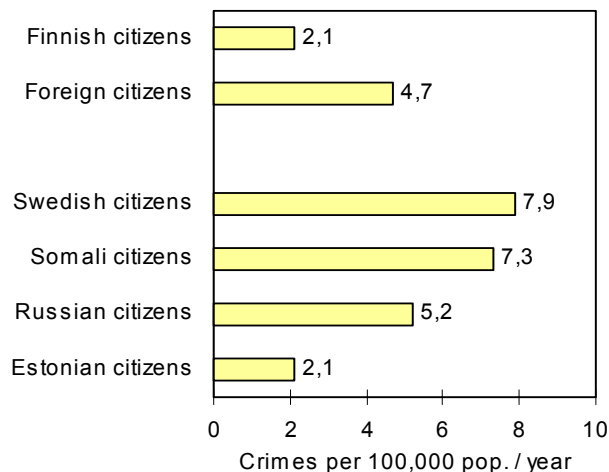


Figure 16 Homicide rates of the main ethnic groups in Finland, 2002-2006.

In 2002-2006, of the four main immigrant groups, the Swedish citizens (to a large extent Roma and Finns living in Sweden with their family roots in Finland) had the highest homicide rate. Also the Somalis and the Russians living in Finland manifested higher than average crime and mortality rates. On the other hand, the rates of the Estonian immigrants were in line with those of the native population.

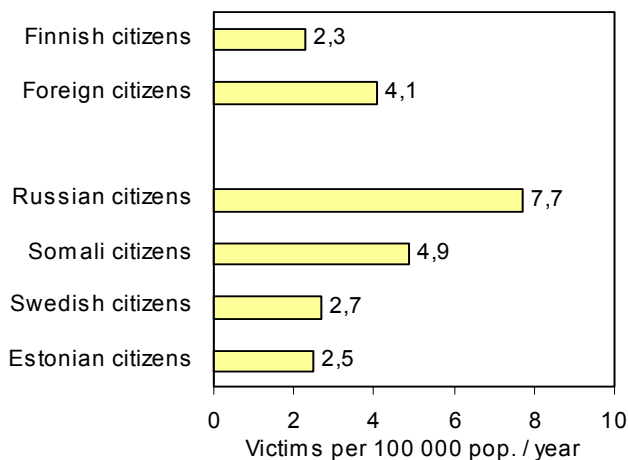


Figure 17 Homicide mortality of the main ethnic groups in Finland, 2002-2006.

5.3 Employment. Although the majority of homicide offenders are of working-age, only a few are employed. 18 per cent of male offenders and 17 per cent of female offenders had a full-time or part-time job or were entrepreneurs; 66 per cent of male offenders and 49 per cent of female offenders were unemployed or on early retirement pension.

Table 6 Offenders by employment status, 2002–2006.

	Male	Female	All
Unemployed	51 %	36 %	49 %
Disability/early retirement pension	15 %	13 %	15 %
Working	18 %	17 %	18 %
Student	5 %	2 %	5 %
Retired	5 %	4 %	5 %
Housewife	0 %	21 %	2 %
Other	2 %	0 %	2 %
N/A	4 %	6 %	4 %
N	475	53	528

Table 7 Adult victims by employment status, 2002–2006.

	Male	Female	All
Unemployed	42 %	32 %	39 %
Disability/early retirement pension	20 %	8 %	16 %
Working	18 %	30 %	21 %
Student	4 %	5 %	4 %
Retired	6 %	15 %	9 %
Housewife	0 %	5 %	1 %
Other	1 %	1 %	1 %
N/A	9 %	4 %	7 %
N	386	155	541

The situation of adult male victims follows a similar pattern: 62 per cent were unemployed or on early retirement pension, 18 per cent employed. The working-life background division of adult female victims differed from that of the other groups: although many of them (40%) were unemployed, the proportion of the employed was considerably higher (30%) when compared with male victims or male or female offenders.

Person's "alcoholism" is based on the judgment of the police. Above, we presented data on the number of offenders and victims who were under the influence of alcohol during the offence. The attribute "alcoholic" is a logically distinct matter because people can commit homicides under the influence of alcohol without being alcohol abusers. More than half of male offenders and nearly half of female offenders were described as alcoholics. The prevalence of participants described as drug users is also high in both offender and victim populations.

5.4 Special groups as offenders and victims. In the FHMS, the police investigating the cases are asked if the offender or the victim can be described as an alcoholic, drug user, persistent offender, member of an organized crime group, or a prostitute. The responses are based on the data accumulated during the investigation of the homicide cases. The findings are shown in Figure 18.

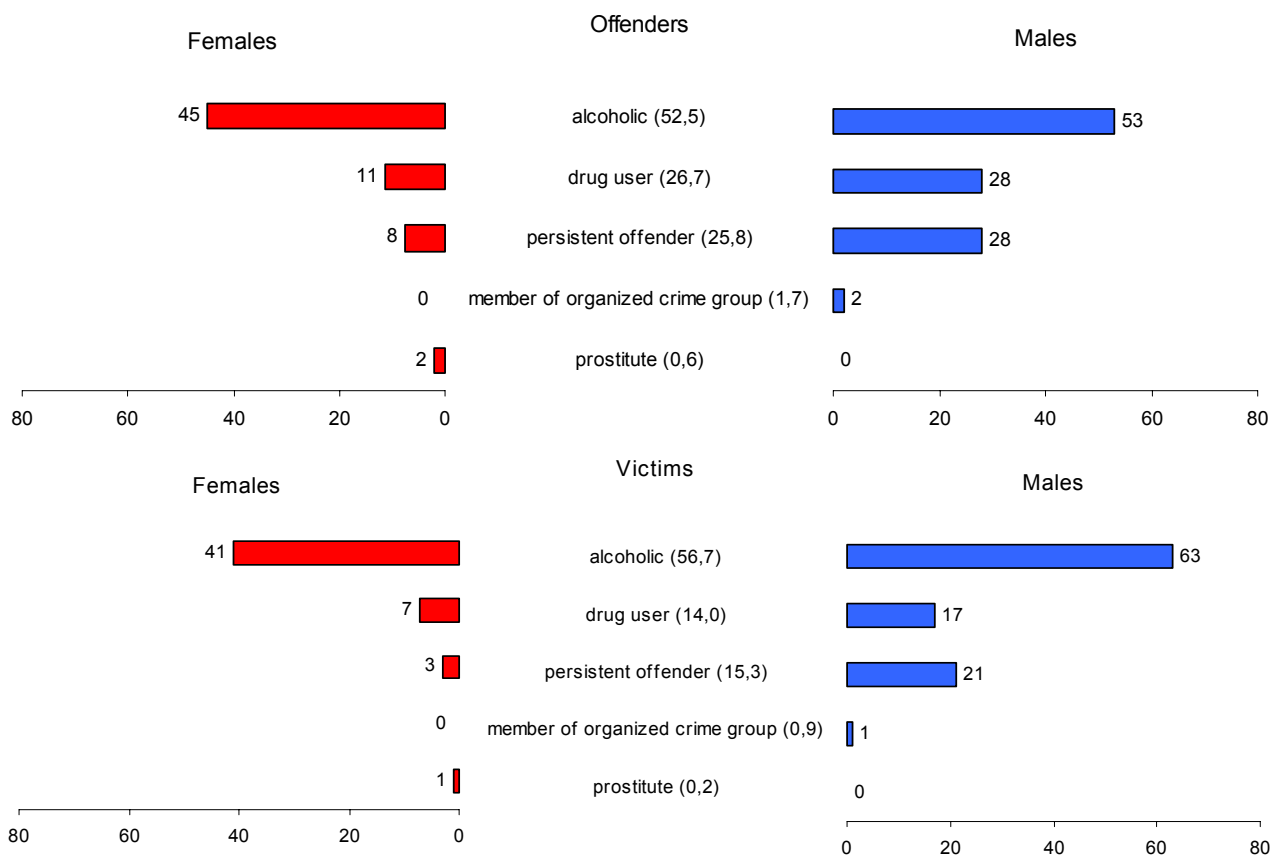


Figure 18 Prevalence of specific personal traits among homicide offenders and adult victims, by sex, 2002–2006 (%).

Interestingly, 29 per cent of male offenders and 20 per cent of male victims were described as persistent offenders. The original Finnish expression "habitual criminal" (*taparikollinen*) refers to crime as livelihood and lifestyle. Cases involving organized crime members as offenders or victims are very rare. The same applies to prostitutes.

The FHMS contains a separate question on whether, prior to the offence, the offender was known to behave aggressively under the influence of alcohol. This information is often volunteered by the suspect, or becomes evident during the investigation¹². Of all offenders, 69 per cent were known to have this propensity. Among male offenders, the corresponding figure was 71 percent. Female offenders were no exception either: 55 per cent of them were known to be prone to alcohol-related aggressiveness prior to the offence.

5.6 Homicide by young people. Homicides committed by juveniles (below the age of 21) are fairly rare in Finland; the average annual number of juvenile homicide offenders has been about twelve in the last ten years. The annual crime level has been 1.8 suspects per 100,000 population of 10–20-year-olds. About 90 per cent of the offenders are boys.

A large proportion, about 25 per cent, of the crimes is connected with robberies or burglaries, and about a third is committed by two or more perpetrators. Especially girls' crimes are usually committed in groups comprising both boys and girls. Also characteristic of juvenile homicides in Finland is the high percentage of victims previously unknown to the offender (30% vs. about 10% in all homicides), and the close connection between the crimes and alcohol abuse: over 80 per cent of the offenders, both boys and girls, were drunk while committing the crime. The use of other drugs in connection with the crimes is more uncommon.

Two thirds of juvenile offenders are diagnosed as either alcohol or drug abusers, and 80 per cent as regular binge drinkers. Alcohol abuse also characterizes their family backgrounds as about two thirds come from families where either father or mother or both are alcoholics. Two thirds of the offenders come from broken homes; in every third family the break-up occurred before the child turned five. One third of the offenders have been taken to the custody of child welfare officials at least once before reaching the age of sixteen.

Young homicide offenders tend to have a long history of psychiatric problems before committing their crime: 30 per cent have been in psychiatric institutions for shorter or longer periods while an additional 20 per cent have received treatment as outpatients. About 70 per cent have been diagnosed as suffering from a personality disorder. In addition, the juvenile offenders usually have a long criminal record: 15 per cent have been in prison at least once, and 55 per cent have committed aggravated crimes, including violence.

6 After the Offence: Investigation and Sentencing

The FHMS was fitted with a series of questions probing the process of homicide investigation. In this section, we present basic data on how the offender first became a suspect, how fast he or she became the prime suspect, and finally on how the offenders are processed in the criminal justice system.

6.1 How the offender became a suspect. The FHMS contains a question on how the police first became aware of the offender's guilt. In a majority of cases (59%), the offender was first identified as a suspect because of

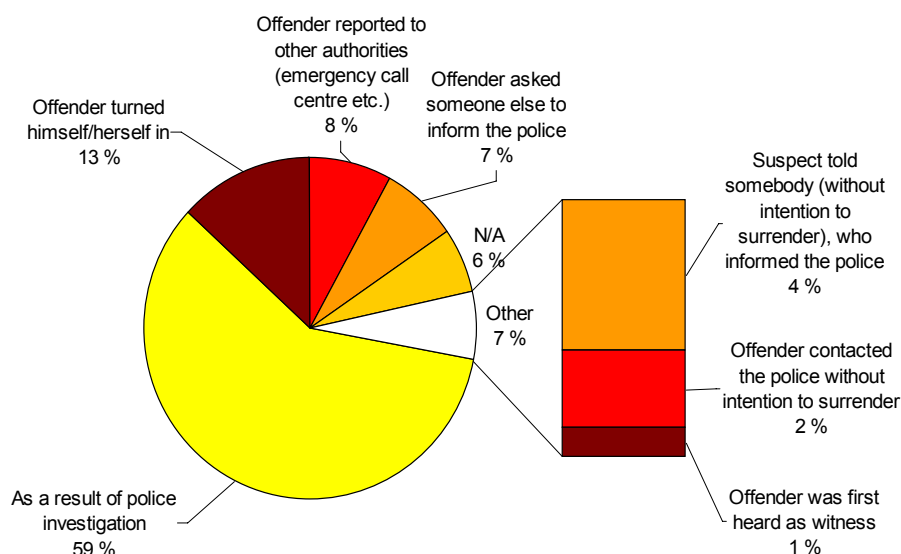


Figure 19 Manner of becoming the suspect, main offenders, 2002–2006 (N=572).

¹² It is possible that this information is volunteered for exculpatory reasons but other research on the alcohol-violence nexus in Finnish violence makes these figures prima facie plausible.

police investigation. In 28 per cent of the cases, the offender voluntarily surrendered to the police, to other authorities, or asked someone else to call the police. In rare cases another person informed on the offender, the offender contacted the police on some pretext (motive for this is not known), or the offender became suspect when he/she was heard as a witness.

6.2 How fast the offender became a suspect. The majority of homicides are reported to the police fairly quickly. In 2002–2006, 80 per cent were reported on the same day they were committed or the next day at the latest. Because of this, and the fact that a large percentage of the crimes are related to drunken violence between family members or acquaintances, most of the homicides are also solved quickly. As many as 69 per cent of homicides included in the FHMS were solved on the same day they were committed (28% of all homicides were reported to the police or to the emergency callcentre by the offender him/herself), and 88 per cent within a week.

The clearance rate of reported homicides in 2002–2006 was 98.2 per cent (i.e. percentage of crimes solved within a year after being reported to the police).

6.3 How the offender was sentenced. In 2002–2006, of the homicides reported to the police, less than 2 per cent could not be solved within the following year, and were still unsolved when entered into the FHMS. In 7 per cent of the cases, the offender committed a suicide, and in 1 per cent died of other reasons before the case was brought to court. At the end of 2006, prosecution and sentencing data were missing for 4 per cent of the crimes (mainly committed in 2006).¹³

In one case (0.2%) the offender was under 15 years of age and not prosecutable in a criminal court. In 86 per cent of the studied homicides, offenders were prosecuted, and in 76 per cent, also convicted. In 6 per cent of the cases, the prosecuted offender was found irresponsible for his/her actions and sent to mental hospital, and in 4 per cent of the cases he/she was acquitted. Of the convicted offenders, 93 per cent were convicted of voluntary homicide, or of assault crime and involuntary manslaughter. Thus, altogether 70 per cent of the persons suspected of committing a homicide in the said period were in the end also convicted of homicide.

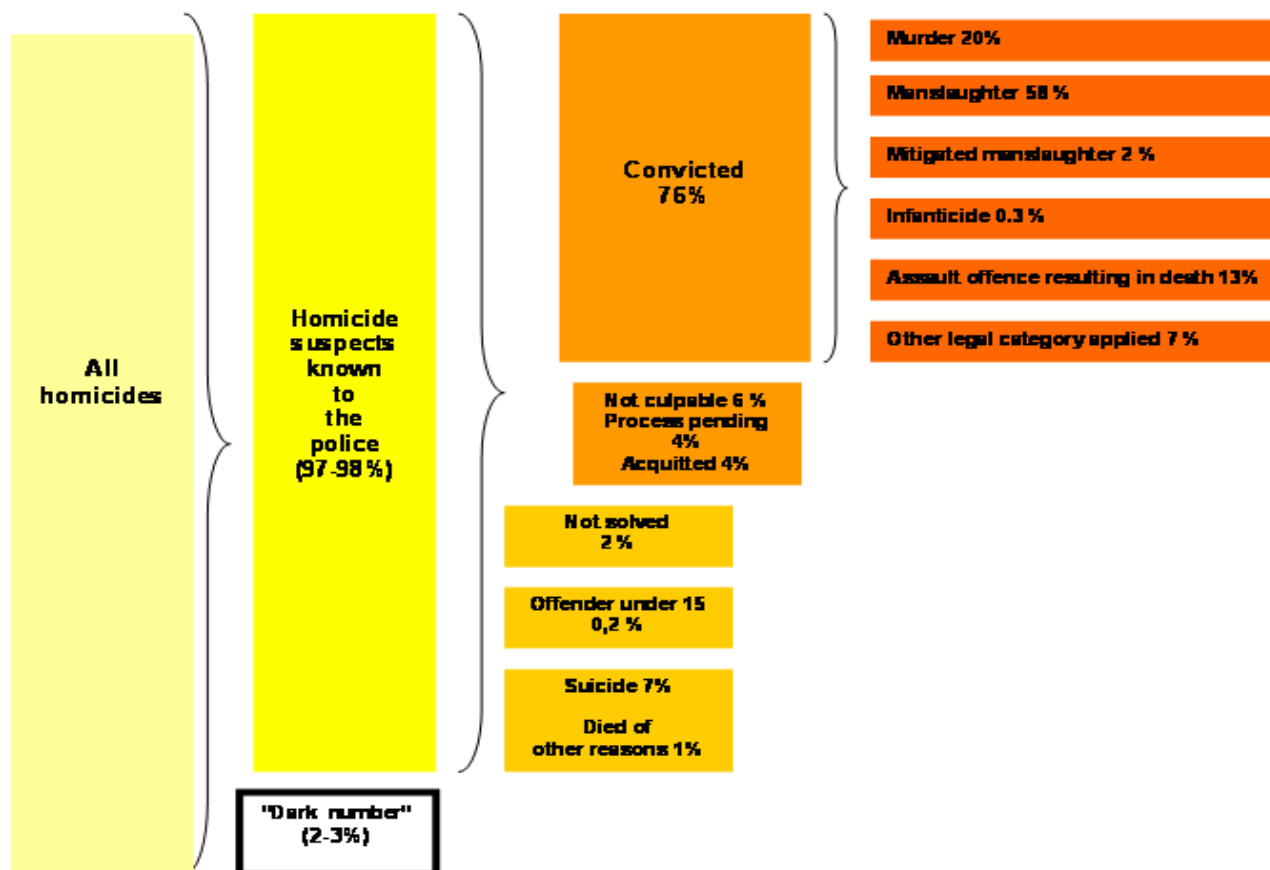


Figure 20 Flow chart of the criminal justice process of homicide in Finland, 2002–2006. The percentages are counted from the number category indicated by the brackets. "Dark number" refers to homicides which are not identified as such by the authorities, and the estimate (2–3%) is based on analyses of the missing persons register.

¹³ The data are collected separately by the National Research Institute of Legal Policy from the databases of the Ministry of Justice, and added to the FHMS database at the end of each year.

The Finnish Penal Code distinguishes between four types of voluntary homicide and two types of involuntary manslaughter (the statutes of involuntary manslaughter are used in the sanctioning of homicidal crime in combination with the statutes of assault crimes). The aggravated form of voluntary homicide is *murha* (murder), the basic and most common form is *tappo* (voluntary manslaughter), while the mitigated form of voluntary manslaughter is called *surma* (voluntary manslaughter under mitigating circumstances). In addition, the Penal Code includes statutes concerning infanticide (*lapsensurma*). The penalty for *murha* is life imprisonment; the penalty for *tappo* is imprisonment for eight to twelve years; for *surma* imprisonment for four to ten years; and for *lapsensurma* imprisonment for four months to four years. The penalty for involuntary manslaughter (*kuolemantuottamus*; *törkeä kuolemantuottamus*) is fine or imprisonment up to six years.

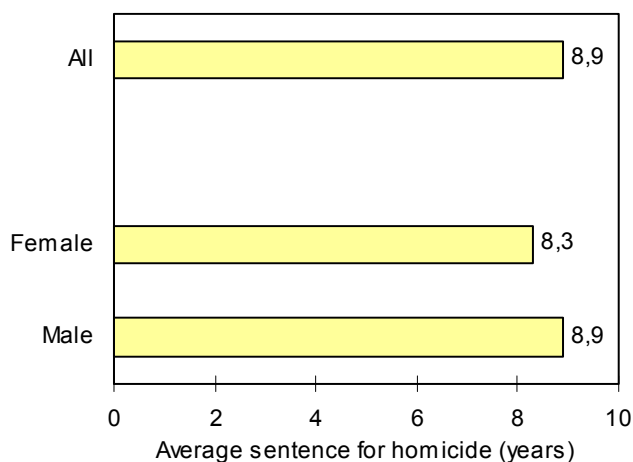


Figure 21 Average prison sentences for males and females convicted of homicide, 2002–2006 (all homicide convictions; courts of the first instance).

Of the homicides recorded in the FHMS and brought to the court of first instance in 2002–2006, 58 per cent were considered as voluntary manslaughter; 20 per cent as murder, 2 per cent as voluntary manslaughter under mitigating circumstances, 0.3 per cent as infanticide, and 13 per cent as involuntary manslaughter resulting from voluntary assault crime. In the remaining 7 per cent of the cases, prosecuted offenders were sentenced on the basis of some other Penal Code statute.

The median sentence imposed by the court of first instance for voluntary manslaughter is presently nine years of imprisonment; in practice this means an imprisonment of four and a half years to seven years before parole. The sentence for murder is life imprisonment which in practice means ten to fifteen years before parole. Of all persons prosecuted and convicted of homicide (regardless of the statutes used) in 2002–2006, 95 per cent were sentenced to unconditional imprisonment, the average length of the sentence being 8.9 years.

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Appendix

The Basics of Finnish Homicide Monitoring System

The Finnish Homicide Monitoring System (FHMS) has collected information on homicides since June, 2002. It is maintained jointly by the National Research Institute of Legal Policy, the Police Department of the Ministry of the Interior, and the Finnish Police College. The aim of the FHMS is to monitor the homicide phenomenon, to create a data-basis for in-depth research, and to serve crime prevention and prevention targeting purposes.

Offence coverage. The database registers information on crimes investigated by the police under the Penal Code titles: *murha*, *tappo*, *surma*, *lapsensurma* (Penal Code 21:1–4) as well as involuntary manslaughters (*kuolemantuottamus*, *törkeä kuolemantuottamus*; Penal Code 21:8–9) committed in a single act with a voluntary assault crime (Penal Code 21:5–7). Attempted homicides are not included.

Based on police investigation. The FHMS database is based on the police data, i.e. information produced during preliminary investigations. The data are collected directly from the chief investigator of each individual homicide on a standard electronic form. It is compulsory for the investigating officers to fill in the questionnaire. The general crime reporting system of the police is used as a control and follow-up instrument to make sure that the data are acquired from all registered homicides.

Information is usually registered after the preliminary investigation has been closed. For crimes which are not cleared within a reasonable space of time, however, the available data are registered about one year after the initiation of the investigation, provided that the case is still being investigated as a probable homicide. Over the past few years, the annual number of this type of cases has varied between one and five, making up one to four percent of all registered crimes in the FHMS system.

Victim-based data structure. The FHMS uses victim-based data architecture. Each row of the data matrix corresponds to a homicide victim. For each case, only one offender is included. This offender is the main offender identified by the police. Since the database contains case and person identification numbers, it is possible to locate co-offenders by specific additional data collection. However, the standard procedure is to enter only the main offender. A separate variable records the possible existence of co-offenders. In the analysis of offenders, special filter variables are used to avoid multiplication by the number of victims.

Data contents. The database contains information on the main characteristics of the crime, on their regional and temporal distribution, on the socio-demographic background of both the victim and the main offender, and on their crime scene behaviour. The system also contains information related to the investigation of the crimes, and information on the behaviour of the suspects after the crime and during the investigation. The number of internal variables for each case is about 90. In addition, the National Research Institute of Legal policy inserts external data on the prior crimes of the offenders and the victims, and also on the punishments received by the offenders.

Time specification. This research brief describes offences which were registered in the FHMS by the end of August 2007 and had been committed in 2002–2006.