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Introduction

This chapter discusses homicide in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Given its greater population, geographic size, geopolitical presence, and more readily available data, we focus on Russia, though where possible we also provide information about Ukraine and Belarus. For a number of reasons, these post-Soviet countries deserve special attention when considering homicide in Europe. First, the social, economic, and political turmoil experienced by many former Soviet countries following the collapse of the Soviet Union was accompanied by a sharp rise in all-cause mortality. In particular, deaths from homicide increased sharply in many of these nations. In 2003, the Russian homicide rate of over 21/100,000 residents annually (MVD RF, 2010) was the highest in Europe (World Health Organization, 2010a) and one of the highest in the world (Krug et al., 2002). Even though Ukrainian and Belorussian homicide rates are lower than in Russia, they are still very high relative to other countries in the European Region (6.46 and 8.53/100,000, respectively, in 2005) (Tenth United Nations Survey of Crime Trends, 2005–2006). Further, despite much greater politi-

cal and economic stability in these nations over the last several years compared to the mid-1990s, homicide rates have not decreased as drastically as they increased during that earlier period.

Second, given the sweeping scale of socio-economic and political change in the 1990s in Russia and Ukraine, and to a lesser extent Belarus, these nations may serve as natural experiments for testing various sociological and criminological theories, especially those related to anomie, as potential explanations for the increase in homicide rates (Kim & Pridemore, 2005; Pridemore, Chamlin, & Cochran, 2007; Pridemore & Kim, 2006). Recent research also revealed several other factors that help to explain the variation of homicide rates in these countries, including specific historical conditions, hazardous alcohol consumption, social structural factors like poverty and family instability, and individual-level factors like education and marriage (Andrienko, 2001; Chervyakov, Shkolnikov, Pridemore, & McKee, 2002; Pridemore, 2002, 2004, 2005; Pridemore & Shkolnikov, 2004; Stickley & Pridemore, 2007).

Third, a few specific characteristics of homicide in these three nations require special consideration and explanation when compared to other European nations. These include the low proportion of homicides committed by firearms, the higher homicide rate in rural relative to urban areas, vast regional differences in homicide rates (e.g., in Russia, regional homicide rates range from a low of around six per 100,000 in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria to over

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130/100,000 in the Republic of Tyva), and the changing nature of homicide in contemporary Russia (Chervyakov et al., 2002; Pridemore, 2006a).

Finally, the legacy of the Soviet era – when crime data were strictly controlled and often falsified when made public – and the ongoing lack of clear and transparent homicide reporting systems in these countries, raise serious concerns about the veracity of the official homicide statistics (Pridemore, 2003a). Hence, the comparability of the two main sources of homicide estimates in Russia, crime data from the Ministry of the Interior and mortality data from the vital statistics, registration system will be examined.

Background

Political Structure

The Russian Federation (RF) came into existence in 1991 after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Ukraine became an independent state after a referendum on December 1, 1991. The Republic of Belarus' Declaration of Independence was signed in July 1990. Each of these countries is a Presidential republic with executive, legislative, and judicial branches and, to varying degrees, democratic elections. There are, however, essential differences in political climate between these nations. Ukraine has had stronger democratic tendencies over the last decade, demonstrated by intense political struggle between different political parties. The Russian Federation, on the other hand, has essentially turned to a “one party state” with one political party, United Russia, that enjoys the unabated support of the Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and that has consolidated enormous political power by suppressing its competitors. While Belarus is formally a democratic presidential republic, it is in fact a “mild type” of dictatorship with Alexander Lukashenko as dictator (CIA, 2010).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, there was a sweeping transition from a command economy toward a free-market democracy, during which the citizens of each of these

three nations experienced swift, widespread, and profound political, economic, and social change. It was a time of emergence of new economic and political philosophies and newfound individual freedoms, as well as a period of disruption of formal social control and conventional social institutions and a time of multiple social problems, including high levels of poverty, unemployment, increasing inequality, and a mortality crisis (Kim & Pridemore, 2005; Walberg, McKee, Shkolnikov, Chenet, & Leon, 1998). During the 1990s, there was growing economic polarization of the population, with an impoverished majority and a *nouveau riche* minority (the “New Russians”) that is a source of continuing social conflict (Gilinskiy, 2005). According to official data, the ratio between the incomes of the bottom 10% and top 10% increased from 1:4.5 in 1991 to 1:15 in 1999. In the opinion of some experts, the actual ratio between the incomes of the highest and lowest 10% is as high as 25 to 1 in Russia (Human Development Report in the Russian Federation 1999; Just and Unjust Inequality in Contemporary Russia 2003) and 60 to 1 in Moscow (Gilinskiy, 2005).

Population

The Russian Federation occupies one of the largest territories in the world, with over 17 million square kilometers. The population of these three former Soviet republics, including Russia, has steadily declined since the early 1990s. The Russian Federation grew from 103 million residents in 1951 to 149 million in 1991, then declined to 139 by 2010, which translates to a negative population growth rate of -0.47% annually (CIA, 2010). The most rapid depopulation has taken place in Ukraine, which had a population of 45 million in 2010 and was experiencing a population growth rate -0.62% . Belarus has about ten million residents and a population growth rate of -0.37% (CIA).

Among these three former Soviet countries, Russia has the most uneven population distribution over its enormous territory. Russians predominantly (78% of the population) live in the

European part of the country (west of the Ural Mountains), with less than one-quarter of the population living in the vast Asiatic sector (west Siberia, east Siberia, and the Russian Far East). About 75% of the population of each of the three nations lives in urban areas, and the sex ratio – 46% men and 54% women – is nearly the same in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

Police

There are two branches of the executive power in each of these three countries dealing with homicide: the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD in Russian) and the office of the public prosecutor (*Prokuratura* in Russian). The Criminal Militia Department of the MVD is in charge of registering and investigating homicides. In addition to supervising the execution of the law, the office of the public prosecutor in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus also investigates homicide on its own. This incongruous practice, left over from the Soviet era, serves as one of the factors conducive to the distortion and confusion of the criminological statistical data, including homicide (Luneev, 2005: 301).

Due to the legacy of the Soviet era's extended police network on the one hand and the current paramilitarization of the police (Galeotti, 2010) on the other, the already inflated staff of the MVD is constantly growing despite President Medvedev's call to decrease its size by 20% by 2012. The number of MVD personnel in Russia is estimated at nearly 1.4 million, resulting in a high ratio of one militia staffer for about every 100 citizens (Galeotti). According to Galeotti's (2010) estimates, however, the true officer-to-citizen ratio may be 1:267 for Russia (compare to 1:429 in the UK and 1:380 in the US) because of the large number of bureaucrats, which may comprise nearly 870,000 of the overall number. Belarus has the largest number of law enforcement staff per capita among the post-Soviet states, with about 1,400 militia members per 100,000 residents (Belarus Leading in Number of Militia Staff, 2010). According to the same survey, Russia is ranked second with 976 law

enforcement officers per 100,000 residents. Despite such an inflated militia staff and growing paramilitarization of the police, Russian citizens tend to express growing distrust toward the police, which has been exacerbated by a large number of killings by police officers (Levada Center, 2004; Luneev, 2005).

Alcohol Use

Since heavy population drinking has been shown to be strongly associated with cross-sectional and temporal homicide rates in Russia (Pridemore, 2002; Pridemore & Chamlin, 2006), we briefly describe the main patterns and trends in alcohol consumption in Russia and also in Ukraine and Belarus. Alcohol-related harm is considered by many to be a national disaster in Russia (Denisova, 2010a; Leon et al., 2007; Leon, Shkolnikov, & McKee, 2009; Nemtsov, 2002; Pridemore, 2004; Zaridze et al., 2009). Following artificially low levels of consumption during the anti-alcohol campaign of the mid-1980s (officially 3.9 L per person, with Nemtsov's (2006) estimates of 10.6 L per person), drinking increased following the campaign, increased again during and after the collapse of the Soviet Union in early 1990s, and again at periods during the last decade. In 2008, annual consumption was estimated to be nearly 18 L of pure ethanol per person (Shuster, 2009). Illegal alcohol, non-beverage alcohol surrogates, and home-produced alcohol have made up a substantial proportion of overall consumption for the last 20 years (Kalabekov, 2007; Kharchenko et al., 2005; McKee et al., 2005; Nemtsov, 2004; Tapilina, 2007; Zaigraev, 2009). In spite of recent proportional increases in beer consumption (Denisova, 2010b; Tapilina, 2007), Russians still prefer distilled spirits, mainly vodka, to wine and beer, and exhibit a pattern of heavy episodic binge drinking, both of which likely increase alcohol-related harm (Leon et al., 2007; Pridemore, 2002, 2006b). The age at which Russians begin consuming alcohol has been decreasing and the proportion of women who drink alcohol has been increasing (Tapilina, 2007; Zaigraev, 2009). There is a growing body of

empirical evidence that reveals a strong association between heavy drinking and wide variety of harm in Russia, including family disruption, reduced economic productivity, alcohol dependence, alcoholic psychosis and poisoning, traffic accidents, assaults, criminal behavior, unintentional injury, and homicide and suicide.

While Russian levels of consumption and alcohol-related harm are exceptional relative to other European nations, some neighboring nations share similar patterns. The average rate of hard alcohol consumption is nine liters and above per person in Belarus and Ukraine. Data on high rates of unregistered alcohol consumption (WHO, 2004) and alcohol poisoning (Levchuk, 2009; Stickley & Razvodovsky, 2009) in these countries provide further proof of the similarities in alcohol consumption in these former Soviet states. However, in comparison to Russians, Ukrainians drink somewhat less recorded alcohol, but consume more unrecorded alcohol (Global Status Report on Alcohol, 2004), though alcohol-related problems appear to be somewhat lower in Ukraine relative to Russia when measured by the amount of alcohol consumed and the consequences for population health (Levchuk, 2009). Still, while these neighboring nations share similar alcohol-related problems, Russia stands out. The hazardous drinking pattern scores developed by Rehm et al. (2002), for example, show Russia and Belarus with the highest scores.

Firearms

Post-Soviet countries traditionally have very low firearm availability and hence much lower gun homicide rates and proportions of all homicides committed by guns (Pridemore, 2006a). For example, the percentage of intentional homicides committed with a firearm in Ukraine and Belarus was around 3.5 and 1.3% in 2005, respectively (Tenth United Nations Survey of Crime Trends, 2005–2006). In Russia, knives and other sharp instruments are the most common weapons used in homicides, with firearms being the primary means of assault in fewer than 10% of cases,

which is consistent with other countries in the region, including Poland.

Sources of Homicide Data

During the Soviet era, access to data on crime and violence in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus was heavily restricted. Raw data were simply unavailable to the public, and the information released by authorities was notoriously elliptic and often falsified (Butler, 1992; Godek, 1998; Pridemore, 2003b). Today, information on homicide is available from two main official sources in Russia, crime data and vital statistics data (Pridemore, 2003a).

Data about crime and homicide in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus are available from the police agencies (MVD) in each nation. These are often provided in annual MVD publications and show rates for the various provinces, by weapon type, under the influence of alcohol, etc. There are several serious concerns about the police data that likely result in a large underenumeration of the true homicide rate (Chervyakov et al., 2002; Godek, 1998; Luneev, 2005; Pridemore, 2003a). In his yearly speech in 2005 to Russian prosecutors, General Prosecutor Vladimir Ustinov stated that only about 25% of all decedents received an autopsy, and often a forensic physician is not called to the scene of an apparent homicide (Ustinov, 2005). Police officials have a vested interest in lower homicide rates, and Gilinskiy (2005) points out that since 1993–1994, there has been a massive cover-up that has prevented a large number of crimes from being officially recorded (see also Luneev, 1997). One piece of evidence that points to this cover-up is the suspiciously high clearance rate. Further, some criminological studies show that the ratio between the actual and recorded number of assaultive crimes in 2002 was 1.17 for homicide and 1.18 for grievous bodily harm (cited by Gilinskiy, 2005).

Another concern about the specificity of the police data on homicide in Russia comes from the peculiar way it is registered by official police agencies. The crime reporting system, for example, includes attempted homicides. Without

access to unpublished MVD data, there is no way to extract the number of attempts (Luneev, 2005; Pridemore, 2003b), though attempts appear to consist of between 5 and 10% of the overall number of homicides reported annually (Pridemore, 2005), with 9.1% in 2000 (Luneev, 2005: 419). In addition, intentional homicide of two or more people in Russia is registered as one crime committed under aggravated circumstances (Luneev, 2005: 408). In other words, the crime reporting system in Russia registers *events* and *not victims* (Luneev, 2005: 409). According to this, homicide of tens or hundreds of people resulting from a bomb explosion would be recoded as one crime, as defined in paragraphs “a” and “e” of Part 2 of Article 105 of the Criminal Code (homicide of two or more people committed in the way dangerous for the community).

Another difference of defining and registering homicide in Russia relative to other countries is how long after the violent act the death occurs. For example, in the United States, a criminal homicide is defined as “any death caused by injuries received in a fight, argument, quarrel, assault, or commission of a crime is classified as Murder and Nonnegligent Manslaughter (1a)” (Uniform Crime Reporting Handbook, 2004: 15). This is not the case in Russia. If the person died not during the attack but later, the event would be registered as intentional grievous bodily harm leading to death (Part 4 Article 111 of the Criminal Code) and would not be included in the homicide category. Nearly 70,000 intentional grievous bodily harm crimes are annually registered in Russia, about one-third of which end with the death of the victim and are not registered as an intentional homicide (Luneev, 2005: 409). In addition, 25,000 people are declared missing every year, and a nearly comparable number of unidentifiable corpses are discovered every year. In the military, from 5,000 to 6,000 die every year, excluding those involved in warfare. Many of these decedents die due to accidents related to military service, suicide, and violent unregulated hazing rituals (*dedovshina*) and abuse of power by older soldiers that often takes sadistic forms (Gilinskiy, 2005; Spivak & Pridemore, 2004). Luneev (2005: 409) estimates that adding all this

up would result in the true homicide rate in Russia being 4–5 times higher than the officially recorded rate.

An alternative source of information on homicide is provided by vital statistics data. The vital statistics reporting system includes legal interventions, executions, and justifiable homicides by civilians. Even in a well-functioning system, the crime rate as measured by victimization surveys is three or four times as high as the recorded crime rate (Gilinskiy, 2005). Though data from population-level victimization surveys are not available in Russia, medical statistics provided to the World Health Organization by the Russian Ministry of Health support this assumption. The WHO and police recorded homicide rates for Russia in 1992 were 22.9 and 15.5/100,000 residents, respectively; in 1993, 30.4 and 19.6; in 1994, 32.3 and 21.8, in 2002, 30.8 and 22.5, in 2003, 29.5 and 22.1 (cited by Gilinskiy, 2005: 272; see Pridemore 2003a, for a detailed comparison of homicide estimates from the crime and vital statistics reporting systems). Vital statistics data also contain error. For example, there may be accidental or purposeful misclassification of cause of death, especially when human, medical, and monetary resources are limited (Pridemore). But despite some inevitable flaws of the vital statistics, the mortality system still reports many more homicides in the country than the crime system.

Patterns of Homicide

In the early twenty-first century, the Russian homicide rate was the highest in Europe and one of the highest in the world (Krug et al., 2002; World Health Organization, 2010a, 2010b). However, the homicide rate had varied greatly during the most of the twentieth century. The mean regional homicide victimization rate during 1909–1911 in the 50 provinces of “European” Russia was 7.9/100,000 residents. There was considerable variation during this period, with the rate ranging from a low of 3.2 in the province of Courland (in the Baltic region) to a high of 18.6 in Novgorod Oblast (see Stickley &

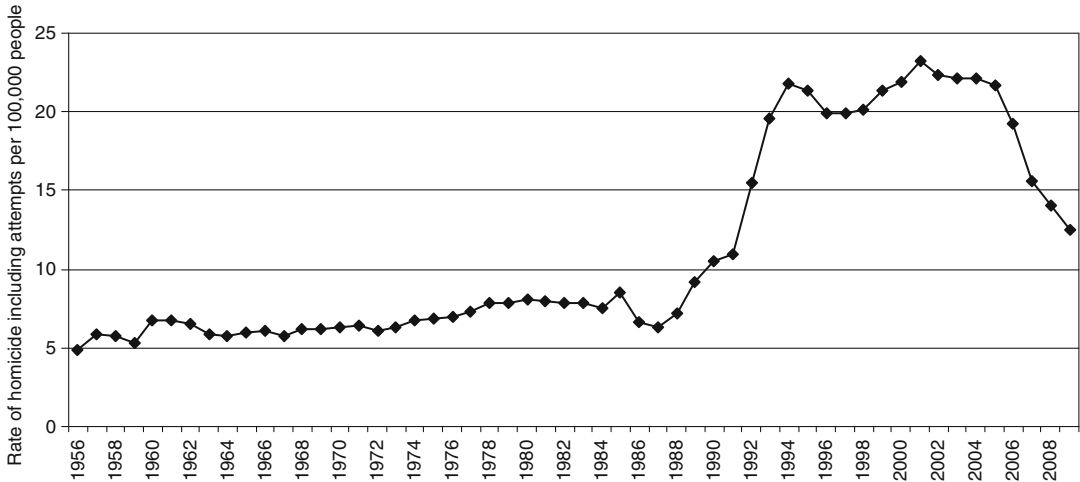


Fig. 29.1 Police-recorded homicide (including attempts) rate per 100,000 residents in the USSR (1956–1984) and the Russian Federation (1985–2009). *Source:* Data for the

USSR (1965–1984) come from Luneev (2005: 413–414) and for Russia (1985–2005) from Gilinskiy (2006), 2006–2009 (MVD, Official site, 2010)

Pridemore, 2007). The overall rate of about 8/100,000 resident at that time was very similar to recent estimates of the US homicide rate around 1910 (Eckberg, 1995). At the beginning of the 1930s, the Soviet authorities for different reasons decided to withhold all statistical information relating to crime and “unacceptable” causes of death including homicide (Godek, 1998; McKee & Leon, 1994; Stickley & Pridemore, 2007), and hence patterns, trends, and rates of homicide in Russia remained hidden for the most of the twentieth century. Political changes at the end of 1980s resulted in the eventual release of criminal justice and vital statistics data on homicide (Gilinskiy, 2005; Luneev, 2005; Pridemore, 2003a).

In the post-WWII period until “perestroika” in 1987, the rate of police-recorded homicide fluctuated between 5 and 8 homicides per 100,000 residents (Pridemore, 2003b), which was comparable to the corresponding level in the US for the same period (Fox & Zawitz, 2003) and well exceeded the homicide rate in the developed European countries (Eisner, 2001). Earlier data suggest that the high homicide rates observed in the post-war period may have been the continuation of a relatively high rate that was in existence at the end of the nineteenth century (Eisner, 2003)

and that continued over to the Communist period (Stickley & Mäkinen, 2005). Figure 29.1 shows that the homicide rate (including attempts) grew considerably during the transition period after 1987 and reached its peak at 22 police-recorded homicides per 100,000 population in 1994, and then again peaked at 23 in 2001. There is a notable decline in the police-recorded homicide rate from 19 in 2006 to 13 in 2009, which some Russian criminologists consider as an artificial tampering with the statistical data (Gilinskiy, 2005; Luneev, 2005). For example, professor and former colonel of militia Babaev has openly stated that he does not believe any number published officially by the MVD, calling crime statistics in Russia an unscrupulous lie (Babaev versus Veller, 2009). He argues that there is no possible realistic explanation for such an unprecedented decline in homicide rate, and at the same time he points out the rise in the number of the unidentified bodies (Babaev versus Veller, 2009). Moreover, there was an unofficial instruction from above to register homicide (article 105 Criminal Code of RF) only if the person dies at the crime scene. In all other cases (e.g., the victim died later in the hospital), the event is to be registered as heavy injuries leading to death (article 111, part 4) and hence not included in the official homicide statistics

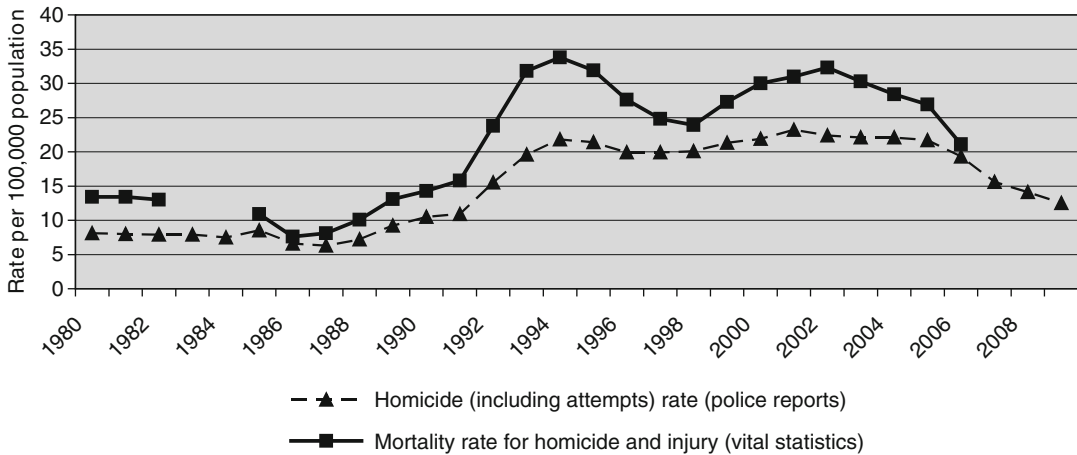


Fig. 29.2 Police-recorded homicide rate (including attempts) per 100,000 residents (police reports) and mortality rate per 100,000 residents for homicide and injury purposely inflicted by other persons (vital statistics) for

1980–2009. *Source:* Police-recorded data are from Luneev (2005) for 1980–1984, Gilinskiy (2006) for 1985–2005, MVD RF (2010) for 2006–2009. Vital statistics data are from WHO (2010b)

data (Gilinskiy, personal communication with the first author, May 6, 2010).

Given the differences between crime data and vital statistics data for homicide considered above, Fig. 29.2 provides available data on police-recorded data and mortality data for homicide and injuries for the period 1956–2009. As we can see, the trends in both police-recorded homicide and vital statistics mortality seem to follow each other (sharp increase from 1992 with its peak in 1994 and then a new rise after the economic crisis in 1998 with the peak in 2001–2002), though homicide estimates from the mortality data significantly exceed those from the crime data for the same years. In their analysis of changing homicide rates in Russia, Pridemore and Kim (2007) found that the mean change in regional (i.e., provincial) homicide rates between 1991 and 2000 was an increase of about 14 homicides per 100,000 persons, or an average increase of nearly 100% over 1991 rates. Of the 78 regions in their analysis, all but one experienced an increase in homicide rates between 1991 and 2000 (the rate in the Kursk Oblast decreased by less than 1 homicide per 100,000 persons).

As for the gender differences in the rates of homicide in Russia (victimization rate provided by vital statistics data for 1980–2006) (WHO

mortality database, 2010a), the male homicide rate was significantly higher than the female rate with a male–female rate ratio of 2.8 in 1980 increasing to 3.7 in 1994 and then slightly decreasing to 3.5 by 2006. Figure 29.3 shows that the male mortality rate for homicide and intentional injury increased about 70% (from 19.6 to 32.8/100,000 of population) in Russia from 1980 to 2006, while the female rate increased about 30% (from 7.1 to 9.4/1,000,000 of population) from 1980 to 2006. It can also be seen that the apex for male and female mortality rate for homicide and intentional injury was reached in 1994, with rates of 53 and 15 deaths per 100,000 population, respectively, confirming that males and females have undergone different mortality experiences, with males increasingly over-represented in death (Godek, 1998; Leon et al., 2007; Men, Brennan, Boffetta, & Zaridze, 2003; Notzon et al., 1998; Pridemore, 2003b; Shkolnikov, McKee, & Leon, 2001; Watson, 1995).

In recent years, Belarus and Ukraine experienced a similar pattern of changes in homicide rate to that seen in Russia and other countries in the European part of the former Soviet Union such as the Baltic States: a rapid rise in the period 1990–1995, after which their rates stabilized and then fell. However, even after this fall,

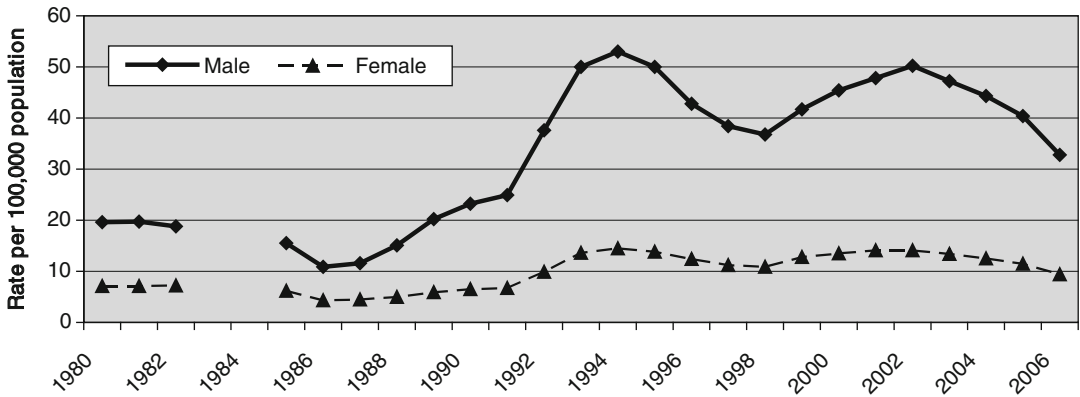


Fig. 29.3 Sex-specific mortality rate per 100,000 residents for homicide and injury purposely inflicted by other persons in Russia, 1980–2006. *Source:* WHO (2010b)

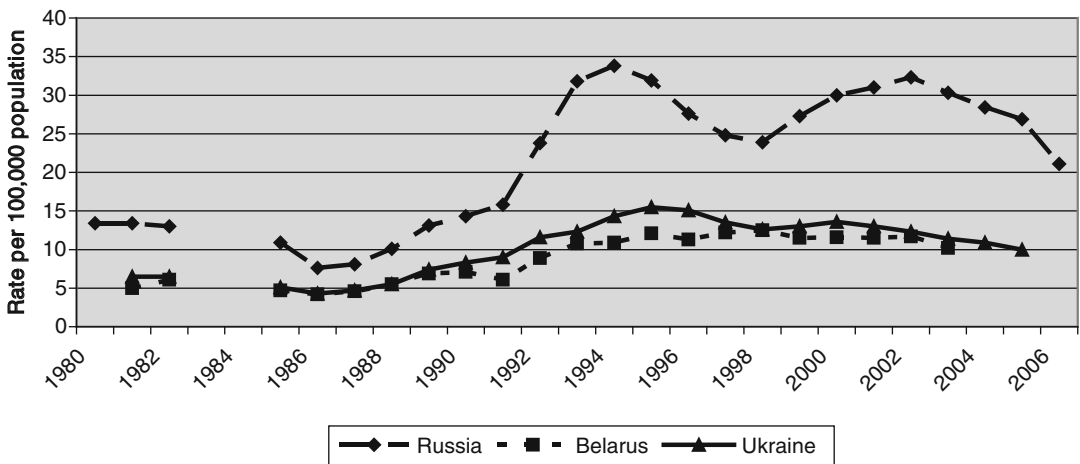


Fig. 29.4 Mortality rate per 100,000 residents for homicide and injury purposely inflicted by other persons in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, 1980–2006. *Source:* WHO (2010b)

the police-recorded homicide rate in Belarus in 2005 (8.4/100,000 residents) was still 19% above its 1990 level and over seven times higher than the rate in the European Union (Tenth United Nations Survey, 2005–2006). Even though the Ukrainian homicide rate, at 6.5/100,000 in 2005, is lower than that in Belarus, it is still much higher than the rate in the European Union (Tenth United Nations Survey). Comparing the mortality rates for homicide and intentional injury in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, Fig. 29.4 shows that Russia stands out with a homicide mortality rate

ratio of 2.4 with Ukraine and 3.1 with Belarus in 1994 (World Health Organization, 2010b).

As with Russia and other nations, the victims of homicide and intentional injuries leading to death in Belarus and Ukraine are most often males, though the gender gap in homicide victimization rates is lower in Belarus and Ukraine than in Russia. For example, in 1994, the male–female rate ratio was 3.2 in Ukraine, 2.8 in Belarus, and 3.7 in Russia.

One of the conspicuous characteristics of homicide in Russia (as well as in Ukraine and Belarus) is the higher homicide rate in rural

relative to urban areas (Chervyakov et al., 2002; Iliashenko, 2003a; Pridemore, 2003b; Stickley, Leinsalu, & Razvodovsky, 2007). This may be indicative of the differential development of urban centers in Russia (as well as Belarus and Ukraine) and other European countries, including the U.S. For example, in the United States, urban neighborhoods became increasingly segmented along racial and class lines, resulting in ghettos characterized by racial segregation, concentrated disadvantage, and high crime rates (Wilson, 1987, 1996). In Russia, on the other hand, urbanization did not occur on a large scale until well into the twentieth century, and Soviet economic and migration policies created an urban landscape that was more egalitarian and that lacked areas of concentrated disadvantage (Pridemore & Kim, 2007). The increase in homicide rates for both sexes amongst nearly all age groups in rural areas compared to urban areas during the transition may be also ascribed to the impoverishment of the countryside after 1995, depopulation, rising alcohol abuse, and deteriorating health care in rural regions (Stickley et al., 2007).

Another curious feature is the regional distribution of homicide rates in Russia and Ukraine, where there is a general increase from West to East (Andrienko, 2001; Men et al., 2003; Pridemore, 2003b; Statistics of death and trauma in Ukraine in 2007–2008, 2009). Moreover, regional homicide rates in Russia vary tremendously, ranging from a low of 7/100,000 in Kabardino-Balkaria to a high of 135 in Tyva (Antonov-Romanovskiy, 2000).

Incident Characteristics of Homicide

When discussing victim, offender, and event characteristics of homicide in Russia, we must keep in mind our earlier discussion of police data and note that incident characteristics are much determined by whether the offender was found (Alimov & Antonov-Romanovskiy, 2000; Pridemore & Eckhardt, 2008). For example, there are conspicuous differences in victim characteristics in cleared relative to unsolved homicides. Alimov and Antonov-Romanovskiy (2000)

undertook a comparative analysis of solved and unsolved homicides in Moscow. They found that cleared homicides took place mainly between relatives and acquaintances in the apartment or flat of the victim or the offender. The leading motives were arguments, revenge, and fights in 40% of homicides, jealousy in 7%, and other emotional reasons in 30–35%. Profit was the motive in about 10–15% of homicides. Females were victims in every third homicide and the weapon of choice was mostly a knife. In unsolved homicides, on the other hand, the event mostly took place in the doorways, stairwells, and courtyards of apartment buildings. Most of the victims were males (85%) with a university education (8 times greater than for cleared homicides), and 31% were private businessmen (18 times greater than solved homicides). Every fourth homicide was committed with the firearm (5 times more solved homicides) with a profit motive in 38% of cases, profit revenge in 14%, and to hide another crime (7%) (Alimov & Antonov-Romanovskiy).

Based on a set of detailed narratives containing extensive information about homicide events in the Udmurt Republic, Pridemore and Eckhardt (2008) found systematic differences between homicides in which alcohol was involved and absent and provided an alcohol-based typology of homicide. Alcohol-related homicides were significantly more likely to occur overnight, on weekends, and to result from acute arguments, and they were significantly less likely to occur between strangers, to be profit motivated or premeditated, and to be carried out to hide other crimes. However, no significant differences between the drinking and nondrinking samples were found for victim's gender, primary weapon used, or event location.

Victim–Offender Relationship and Dynamics of Violence

In a large majority of all homicides, victim and offender were intimately related to each other or were acquaintances. Among local inhabitants of Moscow, in 51% of homicides, offenders and victims were acquaintances and in 26% they were

relatives (Gorbatovskaya & Matveeva, 2000). Based on data from the Udmurt Republic in Russia, offender and victim were related in 52% of homicides (Pridemore & Eckhardt, 2008). This raises the issue of intimate partner and family violence in Russia, which is very high but unfortunately has not been recognized widely as a serious problem in the country (Ivanov & Andreeva, 1998; Lysova & Douglas, 2008), though the dynamics of violence often leading to homicide among relatives, cohabitants, and acquaintances in Russia has been previously investigated by Russian and foreign criminologists and sociologists (Iliashenko, 2003a, 2003b; Lysova & Shchitov, 2010; Pridemore & Eckhardt, 2008; Straus et al., 2007; Vannoy et al., 1999).

The typical family situation leading to homicide in Russia looks as follows. Usually, the violent argument starts when family members are home from work: between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. (Iliashenko, 2003a; Pridemore & Eckhardt, 2008), during the weekend (mostly on Fridays and Saturdays) (Pridemore, 2004) and holidays, when Russians usually consume a lot of alcohol (Iliashenko, 2003a, 2003b; Pridemore, 2004; Razvodovsky, 2007; Stickley & Pridemore, 2007). Violent arguments leading to injuries and deaths often involve some level of victim precipitation (Pridemore & Eckhardt, 2008). In their study of violence in Russian families, for example, Vannoy et al. (1999) found that when women report their victimization experiences, they also often report their own use of intimate partner violence in their relationships. For example, among the married/cohabiting women, 14% threw something at their male partners, 22% shoved or pushed him, 17% slapped or struck him, and 6% beat him, and among the divorced women, 19% threw something at their former husbands, 22% shoved or pushed him, 23% slapped or struck him, and 12% beat him (Vannoy et al.). Other research has suggested that who is the victim and who is the offender may change over the course of a violent interaction (Pridemore & Eckhardt, 2008). It may happen that the initial “offender,” instigating an initial argument or aggression, may ultimately become the homicide victim, particularly if the participants have been drinking.

Weapon Use

It was not until 1999, when detailed ICD-10 codes were included in individual death records in many regions of the Russian Federation, that researchers had an opportunity to look at the distribution of homicide victims by means of assault on a large scale. The most common weapon used in homicides in Russia is a knife, with firearms being the primary means of assault in fewer than 10% of cases (Iliashenko, 2003a; Pridemore & Eckhardt, 2008). In a small-scale study in one region, for example, Chervyakov et al. (2002) found that among the 215 homicide deaths officially registered in the first half of the year 1999 for the Udmurt Republic, 45% were committed with the use of a sharp object, 25% were committed by unspecified means, 14% by a blunt object, 7% by strangulation, and only 5% by firearms. Drinking offenders as well as family offenders are more likely to use sharp objects and less likely to choose strangulation than nondrinking offenders (Pridemore, 2006a).

The Role of Alcohol

In about 46% of homicide deaths in Russia, the perpetrator, the victim, or both are under the influence of alcohol at the time of the homicide event (Godek, 1998). Alcohol intoxication at the time of the offence is considered an additional aggravating circumstance in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. In Russia, the percentage of those convicted of homicide who were reported (according to data from police investigations) to have been intoxicated at the time of the offence declined between 1990 and 1998–1999 from about 80% to about 70% (Nemtsov, as cited in Chervyakov et al., 2002). In the Udmurt Republic of Russia, offenders were drinking in about two-thirds of all homicide events, whereas the victims were drinking in a little over 40% of homicides. In 36% of the homicides, both the offender and the victim were drinking at the time of the event, whereas in 31% of the cases, neither offenders nor victims were drinking (Pridemore & Eckhardt, 2008).

In Belarus, 41% of offenders committing grave crimes and 22% of victims were under the influence of alcohol (MVD Belarus, 2010). In homicides between family members, 20% of victims (most of whom are women) were intoxicated (MVD Belarus, 2010).

In Ukraine, both males and females experienced worsening alcohol-related homicide rates between 1965 and 1983, and then again between 1986 and 1994 (Godek, 1998). For example, from 1986 to 1994, alcohol-related homicide rates increased more than fourfold for males and 2.75 times for females. As for the homicide's contribution to overall alcohol-related mortality, it also grew from 3% in 1960s to 6% by 1994 for males and from 3 to 8% for females (Godek).

Other Incident Characteristics

In Russia, the number of convicted homicide offenders acting with the help of accomplices rose from 12% in 1990 to 21% in 1997, with 5% of murders leading to convictions shown to be committed by organized gangs (Chervyakov et al., 2002). The absolute number of offenders convicted for murders with aggravating circumstances in Russia more than doubled between 1990 and 1997, while their proportion among all convictions for murder increased from 20 to 25% during this same period (Chervyakov et al.).

Victim Characteristics

Most of the victims of violent deaths are men: 76% of male victims in all Russia in 1995 (Pridemore, 2003b). When females become victims of homicide, from 30 to 50% of these homicides take place in the family context (Ivanov & Andreeva, 1998). However, most of the homicide victims in the family are males (65%) (Iliashenko, 2003b). In fact, the male homicide victimization rate in a family context increased from 1970s to the end of the 1990s (Shestakov, 2003: 35). In Ukraine, females comprised 25% of all homicide victims in 2008 and 28% in 2009 (MVD Ukraine, 2010). In Belarus, 34% of victims

of grave and very grave crimes were female (MVD Belarus, 2010). Russia and Belarus stand out in terms of the age-specific homicide rates relative to other nations. The highest victimization rates in Russia and Belarus are found among 35- to 44- and 45- to 54-year-old age groups (MVD Belarus, 2010; Pridemore, 2003b). This different pattern is even more marked for females, where women aged 45–54 have the highest victimization rates (Pridemore). Finally, Pridemore and Shkolnikov (2004) found both marriage and education to be significant protective factors against homicide victimization in Russia.

Offender Characteristics

Over 85% of offenders of Russian violent crimes, including homicide, are men (MVD RF, 2010). The proportion of all homicides committed by males in some Russian regions is even higher, reaching 95% of all homicides (Pridemore & Eckhardt, 2008). At the same time, the number of homicides committed by females in Russia has been growing slightly, from 11% of homicides in 2002 to 13% in 2005 (VNII MVD of the RF, n.d.).

Both homicide offenders and victims in Russia are markedly older than their counterparts in most other industrialized nations (Pridemore, 2003b), and Belarus is similar to Russia in this regard (MVD Belarus, 2010). Most of those convicted of homicide in Russia are between 30 and 39 years old, though the mean age of convicted homicide offenders fell by more than 10% between 1990 and 1997, from 38.7 to 34.6 years old (Nevretdinova, 2000). In spite of the decline, the average age of Russian homicide offenders is significantly higher than in the USA (Pridemore, 2003b). In the USA in 1997, more than 55% of homicide offenders were under age 25, whereas in Russia the equivalent proportion was only half of this (27%). In addition, those convicted of homicide in Russia were older, on average, than those convicted for all crimes together (Chervyakov et al., 2002).

One plausible explanation of the higher homicide rate among older people may be their greater

involvement in family life and hence arguments and violence (Cubbins & Vannoy, 2005; Gondolf & Shestakov, 1997; Iliashenko, 2003a). Older males are also more vulnerable in terms of income, employment, health, and alcohol consumption, especially during and after the transition period (McKee & Leon, 1994; Nevretdinova, 2000; Pridemore & Kim, 2007; Shkolnikov et al., 2001).

Another characteristic of homicide offenders in Russia is their low educational status. Most of those convicted of homicide in the Russian Federation in 1998 (67%) had completed only a secondary education (10 years of regular school education), 17% a specialized secondary education, 13% had less than a secondary education, and only 2.8% finished a university degree (Nevretdinova, 2000). This educational attainment of the homicide offenders was very similar to that in the Udmurt Republic: 35% had less than a secondary education, 48% had a secondary education, 15% had a specialized secondary education, and 3% had at least some college education (Chervyakov et al., 2002).

Explanations

The Civilizing Process and Cultural Spillover Theory

The extremely high homicide rate in the modern Russia may be partly a consequence of the fact that, historically, Russian homicide rates have been comparatively high and lagged behind the decreases that occurred in most European nations (Stickley & Pridemore, 2007).

Norbert Elias and Manuel Eisner argue that there has been a century-long “civilizing process” that resulted in a major reduction in homicide since the late middle ages (Eisner, 2003; Elias, 1978). One aspect of the civilizing process is a decrease in the use of violence for socially legitimate purposes, such as trial by ordeal, torture to obtain confessions, cruel forms of execution, and the right of husbands to use corporal punishment against wives. A recent major reduction in legitimate violence is the prohibition of capital punishment in most Western nations, and during the

last decade, the right of parents to use corporal punishment was ended in 24 nations (Ending Legalized Violence Against Children, n.d.).

In the 1980s, Baron and Straus introduced the cultural spillover theory, which argues that violent crime such as rape and homicide may be influenced by the implicit or explicit approval of violence in various areas of life, such as corporal punishment in the family and schools, the portrayal of violence in mass media, and sports such as boxing and football. This theory predicts a carryover or diffusion from social contexts in which the use of violence is socially approved to social contexts where the use of violence is considered illegitimate or criminal (Baron & Straus, 1989). Many studies provide evidence for a link between legitimate violence and rape (Baron, Straus, & Jaffe, 1988; Hogben, Byrne, Hamburger, & Osland, 2001; Sanday, 1981) and homicide (Archer & Gartner, 1984; Ember & Ember, 1994; Levinson, 1989). In their cross-national study of homicide, for example, Archer and Gartner (1984: 94) suggested that wars tended to legitimate the general use of violence in domestic society via a message that killing another human being was, under certain circumstances, acceptable in the eyes of the nation’s leaders (1984: 94). Ember and Ember found evidence of this in their study and argued that “high rates of homicide and assault are inadvertent (unintended) consequences of more war: Once you learn to kill an enemy, you may find it easier to hurt or kill anyone” (1994: 643).

Rates of legitimate violence in Russia are extremely high. Violence thrives and usually is not treated as a crime or even a problem in cases of family violence against wives (Cubbins & Vannoy, 2005; Vannoy et al., 1999), children in the form of corporal punishment and abuse (Lysova, 2009), and elders (Puchkov, 2005). Violence against the male population of Russia by the police, in the army, and in Russia prisons are other forms of common violence that, while not legitimate, are accepted or committed by those with governmental authority.

Russia has also been involved in a number of wars and violent conflicts with neighboring countries during the last 100 years. During the

twentieth century, Russia participated in the Russian-Japanese War (1904–1905) and World War I (1914–1917), which was followed by the October Revolution and a civil war (1917–1920). Beginning in the 1930s, Stalin's repressions directly touched more than 10% of the Russian population: countless people were executed and sent to prisons, labor camps, and deported to different parts of the country (Oleinik, 2001). The losses suffered by Russia during World War II, of course, were monumental, and the war's impact on the population cannot be overstated. Recent conflicts include the war and ongoing unrest with Chechnya, as well as skirmishes with Georgia.

Thus, according to the concept of civilizing process and cultural spillover theory, all these forms of unbridled legitimate violence in Russia theoretically can directly condone criminal violence in the form of interpersonal homicide.

Social Structure and Social Stress

Pridemore and Kim (2007) explicitly tested the effect of the major force of the Russian transition – socioeconomic and political change – as an explanation of the increase in the rates of interpersonal violence during the 1990s. They found that higher levels of negative socioeconomic change were positively and significantly associated with greater increases in regional homicide victimization rates. They gave to this a Durkheimian interpretation according to which the rapid political, social, and economic change weakened the former means of solidarity, which lost its power to control individuals. At the same time that a strong collective conscience and communitarian ideals were being replaced by the individual goals of freedom, autonomy, and economic opportunities, Russians started to consider material success an important social value. Furthermore, the growing disjuncture between consumerist goals and the limited means of most Russians to reach those goals may help explain the increase in and wide variation of crime throughout the country (Merton, 1968). In the case of Russia, then, it may not only be the

deregulation of desires that is important in explaining heightened levels of violence but also the redistribution or removal of opportunities and the frustration and anger that ensues (Pridemore & Kim, 2007).

An alternative explanation for the increasing homicide rate in Russia relates to the economic performance during the period of transition, especially high levels of poverty and unemployment (Andrienko, 2001; Pridemore & Kim, 2007). For example, Pridemore (2005) showed that poverty was positively associated with the cross-sectional variation in homicide victimization rates in Russia at the aggregate level, and Andrienko (2001) found poverty and low education to be associated with regional homicide rates in Russia.

One particular mechanism through which the rapid changes in social structure lead to an increase in the homicide rate may be explained by the concept of social stress. Social stress is an umbrella concept under which all psychosocial problems are placed (Godek, 1998). Studies show that economic and political practices under Soviet rule, as well as after the collapse of the Soviet Union during the transition period in the 1990s, led to high levels of social stress (Godek, 1998; Shkolnikov et al., 2001; Watson, 1995). Some argue that while females in Russia have a better arsenal of coping mechanisms that enable them to handle the existing stressors, males have become less protected and more prone to despair and stress (Watson, 1995). This jeopardized males' traditional role in public life and as a breadwinner, which might have led to increased violence in the family (as a compensation mechanism) and to alcohol abuse for relieving the stress, and hence further chances of violence.

Since one-third of all Russian homicides are committed within the family, it is worth mentioning that police non-intervention into family disputes, high levels of alcohol consumption in the home, and Russia's chronic housing shortage (e.g., when people cannot move and divorced couples continue to live in the same apartment) may also be serious risk factors for homicide (Ingram, 1999).

Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol-Related Homicide

Multiple studies support the hypothesis that homicide and alcohol are closely connected in cultures where an intoxication-oriented drinking pattern prevails, and several scholars suggest that a binge drinking pattern is important in explaining the high rate of homicide in Russia (Andrienko, 2001; Bye, 2008; Pridemore, 2005; Razvodovsky, 2007). Pridemore (2002) found that Russian provinces with higher levels of heavy drinking had higher levels of homicide. This provincial-level association is not new, however, as Stickley and Pridemore (2007) used historical data from 1910 for western Russian provinces and found the same association. Pridemore and Chamlin (2006) used annual time series data between 1956 and 2002 for all of Russia and found a significant positive association between heavy drinking and homicide. Pridemore and Eckhardt (2008) employed data on homicide victim, offender, and event characteristics in Russia and found that alcohol-related homicides differed from non-alcohol-related homicides on a number of characteristics, including victim-offender relationship and motive. Further, though examining non-lethal violent victimization, a recent study of Moscow residents found that men who binge drink were more than twice as likely than those who did not to have been a victim of violence (Stickley & Pridemore, 2010).

Punishing Homicide

The imprisonment rate in Russia is one of the highest in the world, with a rate of 629 prisoners per 100,000 residents in 2008 (Walmsley, 2009). Nearly 20% of all people spending time in prison in Russia have been convicted of homicide and grievous bodily harm (Andrienko, 2001). The current punishment system for homicide in Russia stipulates the following types of criminal punishment: the death penalty (article 59 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, 1996), life imprisonment (art. 57), and deprivation of freedom (art. 56). The 1996 criminal code is more

severe than any previous criminal codes of Russia, even during Stalin's rule. Moreover, some kinds of probation and parole (deprivation of freedom with suspended sentence) have been excluded from the new criminal code (Gilinskiy, 2006). There has been a moratorium on the death penalty since 1998 (and there have been no death sentences since then), although this has not been ratified by the Russian parliament. In November 2009, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation finally and completely prohibited the death penalty in Russia. Thus, life imprisonment became the most severe type of punishment for those convicted of homicide beginning January 1, 2010.

From 1997 to 2003, the number of those convicted of homicide and sentenced to life imprisonment rose 6.5 times, from 177 people in 1997 to 1,115 people by 2003 (Alexandrov, n.d.). Almost all of them were convicted of aggravated homicide, including 33% who were convicted of homicide with a profit motive, 18% with cruelty, 12% with rape, and 12% who committed homicide in group. The majority of offenders sentenced to life in prison committed two or more homicides (Alexandrov, n.d.).

Punishment Related to Homicide and Violence in Belarus and Ukraine

The most severe violent crimes, including homicide and intentional grievous bodily harm with aggravated circumstances, may still be punished by the death penalty in Belarus. However, since 1997, life imprisonment may be applied as an alternative punishment to the death penalty. Moreover, capital punishment may not be used against offenders who were under 18 years old at the time of the event, females, and males after 65 years old. After the introduction of the new Criminal Code in Belarus in 1999, with life imprisonment as an alternative to death penalty, the number of death sentences dropped from 47 in 1998 to 2 in 2009 (Samoseiko, 2010). Moreover, the number of crimes subjected to the articles of Criminal Code for which it is possible to use capital punishment also went down.

For example, the total number of all sentences (including possibility of death penalty) for intentional homicide (Article 139 of the Criminal Code of Belarus) was 474 in 2001, 390 in 2007, 270 in 2008, and 241 in 2009 (Samoseiko). The number of those sentenced to life in prison has also decreased in recent years, from 20 people in 2002 to 5 in 2009. Currently, 142 convicted offenders in Belarus are spending their life in prison, though it is possible, they may get out in 25 years (Samoseiko).

Life in prison is the most severe form of punishment in Ukraine since 2001. Today 1,553 Ukrainian offenders are spending their life in prison. While there is also the chance that their sentences will be commuted to less than life in prison, the minimum they must spend in prison is 38 years (Silaeva, 2009).

Conclusion

Post-Soviet countries such as Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus deserve special attention when considering homicide in Europe. The social, economic, and political turmoil experienced by many former Soviet countries in the post-Soviet period was accompanied by a sharp rise in all-cause mortality, in particular deaths from homicide. Even though Ukrainian and Belorussian homicide rates are lower than in Russia, they are still very high relative to other countries in the European region. Further, while these rates have been extremely high in recent years due to various factors associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian homicide rates have been higher historically than in other European nations.

Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus share homicide characteristics that are distinct relative to other European nations. These include the low proportion of homicides committed by firearms, higher homicide rates in rural relative to urban areas, vast regional differences in homicide rates, and the significant role of alcohol in homicide offending and victimization. Moreover, due to the sweeping scale of socioeconomic and political changes in the 1990s in Russia and Ukraine, and

to a lesser extent Belarus, these nations may serve as natural experiments for testing various sociological theories, especially those related to anomie, as potential explanations for the increase in homicide rates.

This chapter also addressed the ongoing problem of the lack of reliable and transparent homicide reporting systems in these countries, which raises serious concerns about the validity of official homicide statistics. We provided available data on police-recorded homicides and data on homicide estimates from vital statistics for the last half of the twentieth century in Russia and confirmed previous findings showing higher homicide estimates from the latter.

The most intriguing question for criminologists and sociologists is what reasons are behind the extremely high homicide rates in these post-Soviet countries, especially Russia, compared to other industrialized European countries and even the United States. We outlined several possible factors, including the civilizing process, the cultural spillover effect, social structure and stress during the transition, and alcohol consumption.

Elements of social disorganization, including structural factors like poverty and family instability, and individual-level factors such as education and marriage have been found to be associated with homicide in Russia. The failure of homicide rates to decrease as drastically as they increased, even though political and economic stability is now much greater than in the mid-1990s, might be attributed to the lagged effects of the transition, including serious disruption to key social institutions like the family, education, and the economy, and because those adolescents who were most negatively affected by the transition are now adults.

While punishment related to homicide and violence in Belarus and Ukraine is becoming less harsh and more humane (e.g., less lengthy prison terms, reluctance to use the death penalty in Belarus and its substitution with life imprisonment), Russia's punishment path has remained the same, and perhaps even become more punitive, and Russia's imprisonment rate remains among the world's highest (along with the United States).

In sum, our chapter hints at the high toll of interpersonal violence in Russia and, to a lesser extent, Ukraine and Belarus. Systematic research on homicide is still new in these nations, and it is vital that scholars and public health officials recognize the problem and take steps to better understand the causes of high rates in order to reduce the heavy burden of violence in these countries.

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