

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226331599>

Homicide in Estonia

Chapter · August 2012

DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4614-0466-8_27

CITATIONS

9

READS

415

3 authors, including:



Vania Ceccato

KTH Royal Institute of Technology

119 PUBLICATIONS 1,303 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)



Andri Ahven

Ministry of Justice

18 PUBLICATIONS 63 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



An international assessment of victimization and perceived safety among college students: Focus on women's transit safety [View project](#)



Perceived safety in a shopping centre [View project](#)

Introduction

Homicide is a topic of particular interest in Estonia since the level of violent deaths is well above the European average. From 2006 to 2008, the average rate per 100,000 population in Estonia was 6.6, the second highest rate in the EU after Lithuania in these years. At the same time, Estonia has experienced a rapid decrease in homicide during last 15 years – the rate of homicide used to be more than four times higher in the middle of 1990s.

High rate of violent death is not something that has evolved during the last decades; it has been a problem through very different state orders and social conditions, including the Soviet era from the 1940s to 1980s. In the broadest sense, lethal violence in Estonia should be analyzed in relation to alcohol consumption behavior and cultural traditions. Estonia shares high drinking patterns with its neighbors Finland and Russia, and it also has a remarkable immigrant population whose rates of homicide and violence in general have been and are still higher in comparison to Estonians.

The problems that arise from heavy drinking are also visible in other areas where unnatural

deaths occur: Estonia has been one of the leading countries in the EU rankings of fire deaths and deaths caused by drowning and traffic accidents.

Despite high rates of homicide, it has not become a topic of special interest for the public in Estonia. Although, on average, each week, a person or two are being killed in recent years, media covers only a few exceptional cases during the year. This has probably contributed to rational criminal policy but has not drawn enough attention to social and economic policy areas such as alcohol policy.

Country-Specific Details

The Republic of Estonia is situated in the Baltic region of northern Europe; it is bordered to the north by the Gulf of Finland, to the west by the Baltic Sea, to the south by Latvia, and to the east by the Russian Federation. Estonians are a Finnic people; Estonia is a democratic parliamentary republic and is divided into fifteen counties. The capital and the largest city is Tallinn.

In the beginning of eighteenth century, Estonian territory became part of Russian Empire, but after national awakening period in nineteenth century, Estonian Declaration of Independence was issued in 1918. As a result of World War II, Estonia was annexed by the Soviet Union and regained its independence in 1991; last Russian troops left Estonia in 1994.

J. Salla (✉)
Criminal Policy Department, Estonian Ministry of
Justice, Tallinn, Estonia

Department of Sociology, University of Tallinn,
Tallinn, Estonia
e-mail: jako.salla@just.ee

Population and Literacy

Estonia is one of the least populous members of the European Union. It has a population of 1.34 million inhabitants. Estonians constitute 68.7% of the total population, 25.6% are Russians and 5.7% are of other nationalities (Statistics Estonia, 2010). The population structure in Estonia is similar to those found in EU member countries in general. The share of children (age 0–14) in the Estonian population is 15%, working-age population (15–64) consists of 67%, and older population 18% of population (CIA, 2010).

After the country's independence in August 1991, the total population started to decrease. This process was most intensive in the first half of the 1990s, but slowed down in following years. The causes for this decrease in population are low fertility, high mortality, and migration out of the country (Eesti Inimvara Raport, 2010).

The period of population increase took place from 1950 to 1990, when the population increased from 1.10 to 1.57 million inhabitants. The share of the urban population also increased from 31% in 1934 to 71% in 1989. An essential factor supporting those developments was large-scale immigration from the other parts of the Soviet Union, particularly from the late 1960s until the mid-1980s. Most of the immigrants were young (20–30 years old) and they were mainly accommodated in Tallinn and the Ida-Virumaa county. About two-thirds of these immigrants settled in Estonia permanently (Lehti, 1997).

The adult literacy rate in Estonia is 99.8%, but school enrolment may vary by educational levels (CIA, 2010). Although the percentage of individuals with high levels of education is greater among immigrants than among the native Estonian population, immigrants tend to be more often unemployed than the native population (Statistics Estonia, 2009).

Alcohol and Drugs

Estonia is characterized by high levels of alcohol consumption as well as an increasing use of certain types of drugs, particularly among the youth.

Alcohol consumption was relatively low when Estonia became part of the Soviet Union and up to the 1950s (less than 5 L of pure alcohol per capita), but increased rapidly in the 1960s and reached the level of 11 L of pure alcohol per capita by the end of the 1970s. Despite anti-alcohol consumption campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s, the consumption level remained between 5.5 and 6.8 L per capita (Ahven, 2000). After Estonia regained independence, alcohol became more easily available. At the same time, a liberal alcohol policy was introduced. The consumption level started to increase and reached 10 L in late 1990s. The highest level so far was reached in 2007: 12.6 L per capita, which was higher than most European countries (Eesti Konjunktuuriinstituut, 2010).

The most popular alcoholic beverages in recent decades have been beer and vodka. In the 1980s and 1990s, vodka accounted for about a half of total pure alcohol sold (Ahven, 2000). In 2009, the share of beer was 39% of pure alcohol sold, followed by vodka with 33% and wine with 9% (Eesti Konjunktuuriinstituut, 2010).

To conclude, Estonia and other neighboring countries can be described by high levels of binge drinking (Popova, Rehm, Patra, & Zatonski, 2007), which in turn has been shown to have an effect on the level of violence (Bye, 2008).

Drug consumption shows a similar trend. Drug abuse was very limited in Estonia during the Soviet period due to strict control and few possibilities for traveling outside the Soviet Union. Since the late 1990s, it has become an acute problem, particularly in the north-eastern part of Estonia (Ida-Virumaa) and Tallinn. Ida-Virumaa is bordered by Russia, and the smuggling of heroine from Russia intensified substantially in the second half of 1990s. The target group was relatively young, and this has in many cases caused severe drug dependency at an early age. In the following decade, smuggling from (cannabis, stimulants, etc.) and to the European countries (stimulants) became more significant, and drug abuse also spread to the other regions.

In the recent years, amphetamine-type stimulants, cannabis, and synthetic opiates have been the most widely used drugs in Estonia. A severe

problem has been a high proportion of drug injectors (particularly among young people) that has facilitated the spread of HIV/AIDS. Russian speakers constitute the majority of opiate users, while Estonians seem to prefer cannabis and stimulants.

The Estonian drug policy has been strict and there is no distinction between soft and hard drugs. Still, illegal use or possession of a small amount of drugs for personal use is classified as a misdemeanor, not as a criminal offense.

Some drug-related problems in Estonia are more severe than those in most of the other European countries: relatively young drug users' population, a large number of injecting drug users, popularity of strong synthetic opiates that are particularly dangerous in the case of an overdose, continuous increase of drug abuse among juveniles, and high HIV/AIDS prevalence.

Private Gun Ownership

Private gun ownership in Estonia has traditionally been related to hunting (shotguns, rifles). Handguns for self-defense (pistols, revolvers) were practically prohibited during the Soviet time period and they only became available in the 1990s. The Estonian gun law has been rather strict and the number of legally owned firearms is not high in comparison to the other European countries.

According to the victimization surveys, about a half of guns in the possession of private households have been shotguns and another half handguns. The surveys have shown that the prevalence of gun ownership has remained at approximately the same level since 1993 when the first survey was carried out. The share of households with firearms has varied between 6.5% in 2009 and 8.3% in 1995. One can still observe a decline in the share of households that stated that they hold a gun for defense against criminals: these households comprised 4.8% in 1993 but only 2.5% in 2009 (Salla, 2010).

Estonians possess all types of weapons more than other ethnic groups, particularly shotguns for hunting. The 2009 survey indicated that 8% of Estonian households and 3% of households of

other ethnic groups owned at least one firearm (Salla, 2010). The percentage of shotgun owners has been the highest in rural communities (dominated by Estonians), where 10.5% of households owned such a weapon in 2004. Ownership of handguns has been related to the income level of households. In 2004, 10% of households of the highest income group owned a handgun, but only 1% of households in the lowest income group did.

Previous Studies on Homicide

The most comprehensive analysis of homicides in Estonia, carried out by Finnish researcher Martti Lehti in 1996–1997, aimed at exploring the structure of homicides and the causes of radical changes that took place in the homicide levels in the 1990s (Lehti, 1997).

Lehti analyzed the motives and background factors of 713 cleared offenses committed from 1994 to 1996, which accounted for 76% of all registered intentional homicides (including attempts) in the same period. The main source was information collected by the police during preliminary investigations. Lehti also described long-term trends in the homicide level since the 1920s and compared them to the trends in Finland and some other countries. He paid particular attention to the demographic development during the Soviet period that has significantly influenced the homicide rate since the 1960s.

Data Sources Used for This Study

Three data sources are used in this analysis: police recorded statistics, mortality statistics, and court verdicts on completed manslaughter and murders. The two first sources are used in the discussion of trends and geographical patterns of homicides whilst the court verdicts from January 2007 to June 2010 are used throughout the article particularly for characterizing homicides' offenders and victims. Police recorded statistics are from 1993 to 2009 and mortality statistics from 1947 to 2009.

In Estonia, no special homicide monitoring system has been developed, so the primary data

source has been a general crime registration system of the Ministry of Justice. There is some inaccuracy in this data since the qualification of the offense and other circumstances frequently change in the course of the criminal investigation – the registration-based system does not reflect these changes.

In an attempt to overcome these inaccuracies, the current analysis is based on court verdicts on completed manslaughter and murder cases: a total of 105 cases, of which 77 were qualified as manslaughter and 28 as murder. The use of this type of data improves mainly the quality of data on the offender as we now speak about convicted persons and not about random suspects. Also, the information that the prosecution has gathered by the time of court procedure is more comprehensive and reliable than the data at the time of crime registration. In addition to verdicts, we collected information about the cases where homicide was followed by suicide – these cases do not reach the court and the procedure is normally ended by the prosecutor.

One must be aware, however, that the use of court data leaves out some of the cases: mainly unsolved cases, but also some cases that are solved but, for some reason, do not result in a court verdict, for example, the cases where the perpetrator has died before the hearing.

Between 2007 and 2010 in 105 cases with 107 victims, 120 persons were found guilty of homicide. Murder in Estonian law is defined as manslaughter that is characterized by one or several of the following characteristics: it is committed by someone who has been convicted of homicide before; against two or more persons; in connection with a robbery or for the purpose of personal gain; in order to conceal another offense or facilitate the commission thereof; by using an explosive device or explosive substance or it is committed in a matter that is torturous, cruel, or dangerous to the public. Crime statistics reveal that manslaughter is much more common than murder. During the last 8 years, the proportion of murders from the total number of homicide has varied between 11 and 48%, the latter being exceptional (Kuritegevus Eestis, 2009, 2010). In this analysis, we do not make distinctions between

manslaughter and murder, we refer to both as homicide.

Manslaughter in a provoked state, infanticide, and negligent homicide are excluded from this analysis. The first two are rarely registered and can be therefore described as exceptional cases. Negligent homicide is frequently attributed to accidents, such as traffic accidents or accidents on construction sites.

Epidemiology of Homicide

Trends in Homicide

Long-term trends in homicides are described both on the basis of the police statistics on completed homicides and the statistics on causes of death (mortality statistics). The latter has not been influenced by changes in criminal legislation and crime registration practice, and provides a more consistent basis for describing overall trends, particularly in the Soviet period.

Developments in the homicide level in Estonia have to a great extent been associated with major historical events and their long-term consequences (the World Wars, annexation to the Soviet Union, regaining of independence). The homicide rate increased rapidly in the period of serious difficulties (during and immediately after the wars and Soviet repressions) or quick changes in society (economic reforms in the early 1990s).

Immediately after the First World War and in the early 1920s, the rate of completed homicides was about 7–8/100,000 inhabitants (Susi, 1926). By the mid-1930s, it decreased to the level of about 5/100,000 inhabitants (Raid, 1939; Riigi Statistika Keskbüroo, 1937). There are no exact data on the early 1940s, but according to some estimates the homicide rate increased again and was about 6–7/100,000 inhabitants. These figures' comparability to the previous period and the mortality statistics is not known.

Since 1947, we have relied on mortality statistics that give a more adequate picture of the level of intentional violence, particularly during the late 1940s and the early 1950s – although the

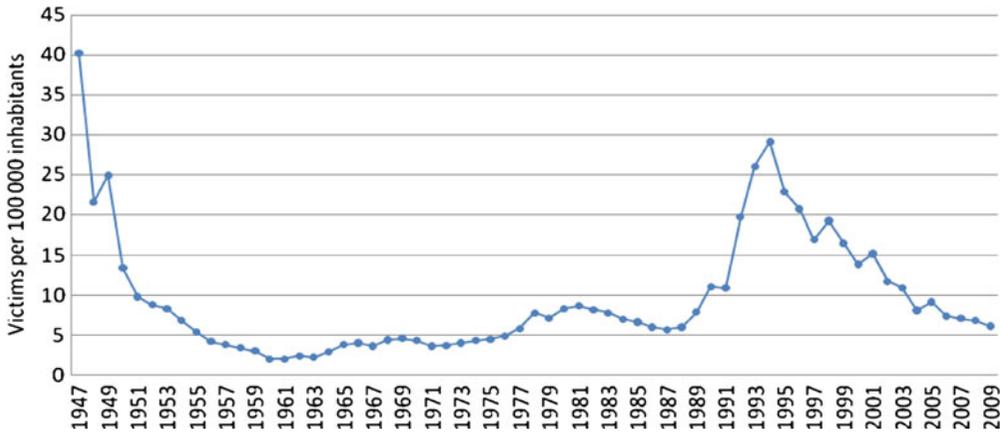


Fig. 27.1 Homicide victims according to mortality statistics 1947–2009

data for those years include a relatively large number of violent deaths recorded without a clearly defined reason. This period was very violent due to armed conflicts between the Soviet authorities and the anti-Soviet partisans in forests, but it seems that the official crime statistics on homicides did not count most victims of such conflicts. For example, the mortality statistics indicate that in 1947 the homicide rate was extremely high (about 40/100,000 inhabitants) and it remained high (22–25/100,000 inhabitants) during next 2 years. According to the militia statistics on registered homicides (including attempts), the average annual rate of such crimes was about 10/100,000 inhabitants during the years 1946–1950 (Leps, 1991) (Fig. 27.1).

In the 1950s, the homicide rate decreased substantially (more than five times) and in 1960 reached the lowest level known in Estonia so far: 2/100,000 inhabitants (24 victims). This trend follows the stabilization of the society and a reduction in repression after Stalin's death in 1953.

The number of homicides began to grow again in mid-1960s, and continued to rise until the end of the 1970s. One of the reasons for the growth was the increased migration from other Soviet republics, as the offense rates for homicide have been 3 times higher for non-Estonians than for Estonians (Lehti, 1997). This trend also coincides with an increase in alcohol consumption.

The homicide rate temporarily decreased in the 1980s. There were no essential changes in society, but the imposed alcohol policy restrictions in 1985–1987 may have had some influence on this decrease (there was also a decrease in the numbers of traffic accidents, alcohol poisonings, and overall recorded crime). At the end of the 1980s, the homicide rate began to rise quickly, and in 1990, it exceeded the 1960s lowest rate by more than five times.

After regaining independence in August 1991, large-scale reforms were initiated, which influenced the whole of Estonian society. Political, legal, and economic reforms were carried out simultaneously with comprehensive reorganization in many areas (including the criminal justice system and border control). At the same time, the state resources to improve people's well-being were very limited.

Such circumstances were favorable for the profiting from various kinds of illegal activities, while the state was not able to effectively control crime, including organized criminal groups (Urvaste, 1995).

Saar, Markina, Ahven, Annist, and Ginter (2003) indicate that during the first half of the 1990s, Estonia was characterized by “the crumbling of the old criminal justice system,” while the new structures planned to replace it were still on the way. After independence, the previous

system of police, courts, and prisons experienced rapid changes. Links between changes in a country's political and socio-economic structural conditions and crime have long existed in the international literature (e.g. Kim & Pridemore, 2005; Messner & Rosenfeld, 1997). In Estonia, these changes generated conditions that triggered violence (for a review of the structural changes in Estonia in the 1990s, see Ceccato, 2008) but they were not the only ones. Increased alcohol availability could also have contributed to the rise of violent crime (Bye, 2008). Radical changes produced difficulties for the most vulnerable groups. Alcoholism and other social problems intensified rapidly in the first half of the 1990s, and mortality statistics showed a rapid increase in homicide and other causes of death.

While conflicts in the criminal underworld were also considered a cause of the increase in homicide at that time, later analyses have shown that such conflicts accounted for less than 20% of homicides. Nearly two-thirds of homicides in Estonia in the 1990s were committed by acquaintances or family members after drinking together. Even before independence, demographic distortions affected levels of violence, particularly those related to differences in violence rates between Estonians and Russian immigrants. In the 1990s, ethnic Russians living in Estonia were three times more likely to be guilty of or become victims of homicides (Lehti, 1997).

In 1994, the homicide rate reached its highest level after the year 1947: 29.1/100,000 inhabitants (426 victims). The rates of suicide, alcohol poisoning, traffic accidents, and other accidental deaths also reached their peaks since 1950 (Ahven, 2000; Statistics Estonia, 2010).

According to mortality statistics, the homicide rate has substantially declined and reached the level of 6.1/100,000 inhabitants in 2009, which is close to the rate in 1988.

Despite the continuous decline in the homicide rate in Estonia in the 2000s, the country shows relatively high levels of lethal violence compared with other EU countries. The other Baltic countries, Latvia and Lithuania, have also had significantly higher homicide rates than other countries in the European Union throughout the last two

decades. Compared to Russia, however, in the last 50 years, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania had relatively low homicide rates (Stickley & Mäkinen, 2005). Historical differences between Baltic countries and the rest of Europe concerning levels of violence have already been discussed in the section "Regional variation in Europe between homicide and other forms of crime, violence, and mortality" by Aebi and Linde in this book.

Among the Baltic countries, Estonia has historically shown higher homicide rates than its Baltic neighbors (Lehti, 2001), but inconsistencies in the way data are reported may explain part of these regional variations. According to the European Sourcebook (2003), homicide rates vary significantly between countries, even when attempted homicide is excluded. Other variations in definitions (for example, murder and manslaughter) may influence homicide rates but do not, by themselves, explain these differences.

As the number of homicides has been falling since 1994, the number of less serious violent offenses has been rising. For example, between 2003 and 2008, the number of violent crimes registered by police rose 36% in Estonia (Salla & Tammiste, 2009). This rise, though, has mainly been contributed to changes in law that abandoned private indictment in criminal procedure (*ibid*).

There is evidence that the violent nineties have been followed by a much more peaceful period for both homicide and violence in general in Estonia. According to victimization survey, prevalence rate of assaults and threats declined remarkably between 1999 and 2003 (Salla & Surva, 2010). In the 1990s the percentage of the population that was victimized by violence was between 5.0 and 6.3. That made Estonia a country with one of the highest levels of violence in the International Criminal Victimization Survey (ICVS). The survey conducted in 2004 showed that victimization had fallen by 2.7% and that was below the average (3.1%) in the ICVS (van Dijk, van Kesteren, & Smit, 2007).

Regional Distribution of Homicide Rates

Homicides, like any other type of crime, tend to be clustered in space. In Estonia, regions with larger cities or towns tend to have more homicide

cases than rural areas, but there are exceptions to the rule. Although rates might be similar between rural and urban areas,¹ three-fourths of murders were committed in urban areas and one-fourth in rural areas (Lehti, 2001).

This urban–rural proportion is still similar today. According to crime statistics (Kuritegevus Eestis, 2009, 2010), between 2003 and 2009 the highest number of homicides (including attempts) was registered in the Harju County (mostly in Tallinn), followed by the Ida-Viru County (north-east Estonia, 70% in Narva and Kiviõli) and the Tartu County (central Estonia, two-thirds in Tartu city). No homicide was registered in the counties of Saare, Hiiu, Järva, and Valga. Counties such as Lääne-Viru, Pärnu, Jõgeva, and Põlva registered less than ten cases in the last 6 years. This spatial pattern is to a certain degree stable but not identical over time. A more nuanced picture is revealed when cases of homicides are analyzed as a function of the total population of each county (rates) and when the population of Estonia as a whole is taken into account (ratios). We will now discuss regional variations of homicide between 1993 and 2009 looking first at *rates* and later at *ratios*. (Whilst in rates, crime totals are divided by the total population of a region only, ratios take into account both crime and total population of the whole of Estonia² in each ratio of homicide for a region, providing a more reliable measure of risk than rates) (Fig. 27.2 – see Appendix, pg. 495 or online at extras.springer.com).

The county of Ida-Viru shows the highest homicide rates between 1993 and 2009 in Estonia – Ida-Viru’s rates were higher than those found for the country as a whole. In 1993, Ida-Viru’s rate (40.7) was followed by high rates in the

counties of Harju (18.6), Tartu (17.7), Järva (16.2), Rapla (12.6), and Jõgeva (7.1). In 2009, the county of Ida-Viru was still on the top of the list of homicide rates, but to a much lower degree (11.2/100,000 inhabitants), showing a decrease of 70% in nearly two decades. The homicide decay is experienced in all regions, but regions with initially high rates tended to have higher decreases than the ones with lower rates. For instance, the city of Tallinn and counties of Rapla, Tartu, Pärnu, and Järva showed a reduction of more than 80%, whilst Jõgeva and Põlva counties decreased by a quarter or a half of the rates of the early 1990s.

Interestingly, the increase in homicides in the 1990s was also very regionally uneven. According to Lehti (1997), the increase took place first in Ida-Viru and in the area of Tallinn. Homicides in the 1990s would seem to have increased both in the regions that have benefitted from the reforms and in those that have suffered from them, but not everywhere. Western Estonia (especially the islands) has remained almost untouched by the increase in violence, despite the fact that the social change has swept over it as well.

Standardized homicide ratios were calculated in order to identify counties in Estonia that run a relatively high risk for homicide, taking into account the overall distribution of murders in Estonia. Shifts occurred in the geography of homicides between 1993 and 2009. In Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, the observed number of homicides was lower than expected in ten out of 17 years. Remember that Tallinn has experienced one of the largest reductions in homicides since the early 1990s and that ratios are dependent on what happens in the rest of Estonia (Fig. 27.3).

As expected, the county of Ida-Viru shows levels of homicide that are higher than expected during the whole period. Ida-Viru is the only area in Estonia that had a relative risk twice that to be expected given the population of the county (standardized homicide ratios were more than 200) during the whole period 1993–2009. Exceptions occurred in 1997 and 2004 when ratios were lower but still above that expected (185 and 125, respectively). Inhabitants of the counties of Jõgeva and Põlva run a higher risk for

¹The definition of rural and urban differs from country to country or even within countries. Comparisons in homicide rates between rural and urban areas should therefore be taken cautiously.

²Thus, the standardized offense ratio (SOR) for region i is the ratio between the observed number of offenses $O(i)$ and the expected number of offenses $E(i)$. In this analysis, an average offense rate was obtained by dividing the total number of offenses by the total size of the population. For each area i , this average rate is multiplied by the size of the chosen denominator in area i to yield $E(i)$.

homicide in the 2000s than in the 1990s. Note also that these counties have experienced the smallest percentage decrease in homicide rates since 1993. Although the risk of homicide is higher in relation to Estonia as a whole, homicide rates in these counties are stably low (around 5/100,000 inhabitants).

Regional differences in homicide rates in Estonia are traditionally related to differences in the population's demography and ethnic composition. The non-Estonian population is, for instance, overrepresented in Ida-Viru. Lehti (1997) indicates that the age structure of Russians in Estonia differs from that of the native population, which affects the propensity and vulnerability of these two groups to be involved in homicides (either as offenders or as victims). However, the author also suggests that the fact that two-thirds of homicides in Estonia are committed by non-Estonians cannot be accounted for by demography alone, since the overrepresentation of non-natives among the offenders is too great. Differences in lifestyle and culture should also play a role (Lehti, 1998).

Incident Characteristics

According to court case materials from the years 2007 to 2010, homicide incidents in Estonia are characterized by close relations between victims and perpetrators and no clear motive from the side of the perpetrator. They are usually committed in homes during alcohol-drinking events involving both the offender and the victim.

One hundred and five analyzed cases showed that approximately in nine out of ten cases, the perpetrator, victim, or both parties were under the influence of alcohol. In the remaining cases, it was either known that both the perpetrator and victim were sober or the information about intoxication was not available. The share of cases where both parties were intoxicated was 68%. In addition, there were the cases (19% of total) where the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol (the victim was sober or the intoxication was unknown). There was also one case where the victim was drunk and the perpetrator was sober.

Pridemore and Eckhardt (2008) have found that alcohol-related homicides are significantly more

likely to occur in the context of acute arguments and less likely to be pre-mediated or profit oriented. This conclusion is something that cannot be overlooked when analyzing the context of the incident and the motives of perpetrators. We also found it applicable to Estonian cases, but our data suggest that alcohol plays an important role in profit-oriented homicide cases as well.

Type of Incidents According to Motive and Victim–Offender Relationship

The situations where homicide incidents took place were categorized as domestic, criminal, argument based, robbery, sexual, other, and unknown. In our dataset, the highest share of events were argument based (47%), which were followed by domestic homicide cases (21%) that were also mostly preceded by heated arguments. The overall share of robbery-related homicides, unclassified cases, and cases classified as other were equally 11%. We did not find cases that could be classified as sexual or criminal.

Argument-based homicides ($N=49$) were almost exclusively committed by male perpetrators; there was only one case with two perpetrators and one of them was female. The victims of these cases were also more likely to be male; females accounted for 10% of the victims.

According to the analysis, it is a rare exception when homicides preceded by arguments do not involve alcohol abuse. There were no cases where both the victim and the perpetrator were known to be sober and there was only one case where the intoxication was unknown for both parties.

This type of homicide also only rarely involves strangers; in the majority of cases, the victim knew the perpetrator and, as stated above, it was likely they were drinking together before the incident. In most cases, it was hard to define why the argument grew to violence, as the testimonies of witnesses and perpetrators were ill-defined and the only thing that the perpetrator could often say was that he regrets what happened and he has no idea why it did happen. This is most likely explained by blind drunkenness – in these cases, large quantities of strong alcohol such as vodka

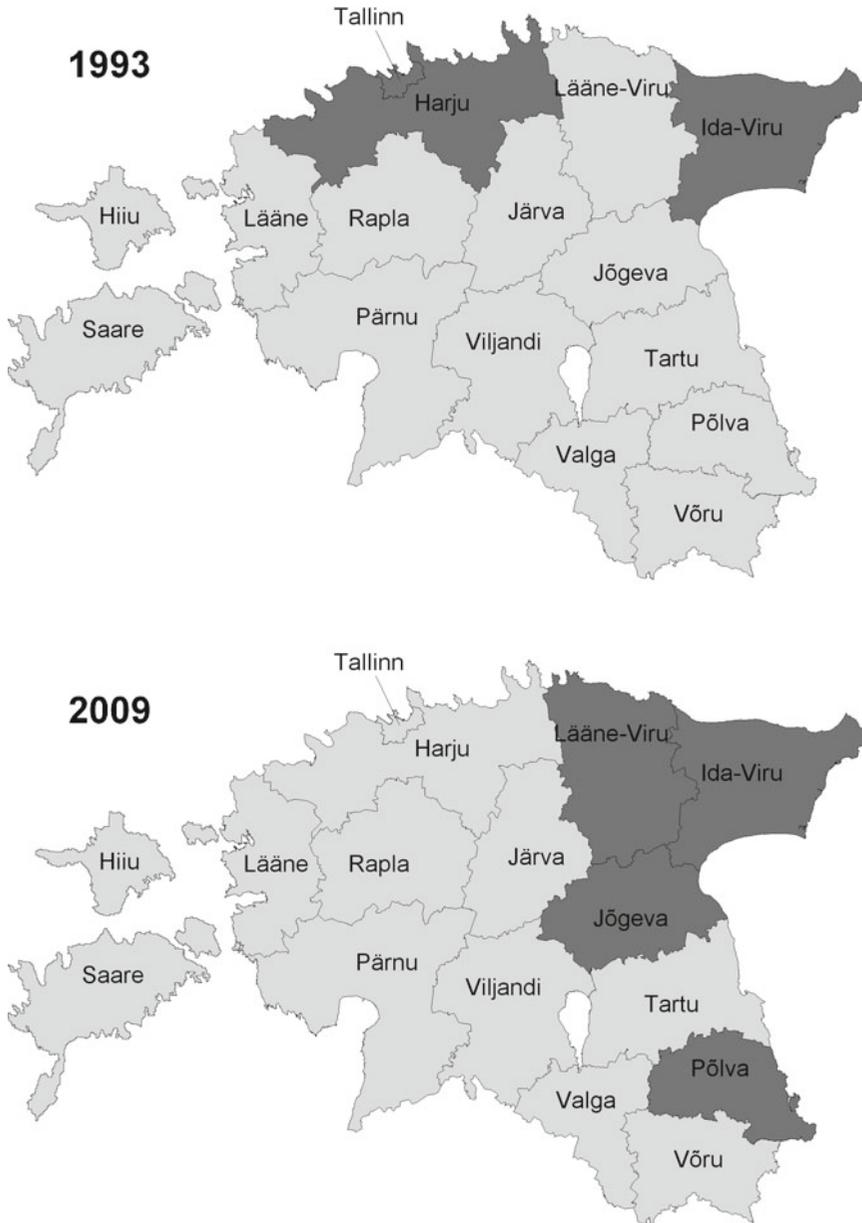


Fig. 27.2 Standardized Homicide Ratios (SORs) in 1993 and 2009. Dark grey show where the expected values of homicides are higher than the expected ones in Estonia, $E(i) > O(i)$

are often being consumed. Perpetrators often claim that they became aware of what had happened only after becoming sober in jail.

In a minority of cases, the reason for the argument was either revenge or a demand of debt, but evaluating these cases, it seemed that killing or hurting the victim was not the initial intention of the perpetrator, it was more likely to be *some-*

thing that happened because of low self-control under the influence of alcohol.

Domestic homicide ($N=22$) mostly takes place at the victim's home. There were nine killings of intimate partners, including three male and six female victims. Five assaults were directed against parents, all of them committed by male perpetrators. In four cases, the mother-in-law was killed

and in the remaining cases there were the killings of brothers, a daughter, and a grandmother of the intimate partner. Several cases showed a long history of continuous violence between parties; in these cases, there were testimonies that showed that violence was an accepted way of problem solving in these relationships.

Domestic homicide is not likely to be pre-mediated; most cases are very similar to argument-based homicide cases that grow out of gatherings where strong alcohol is consumed. But not only intimate partners drink together, but larger circles of family that include grandparents, mother-in-laws, brothers, and sisters are also involved. These homicides often occur in poor social conditions where it is rather unusual for participants to work or be involved in social life in general.

In three-fourths of cases where some information could be gathered, both the victim and the perpetrator were drunk at the moment of killing; in the remaining cases, the perpetrator was intoxicated and the victim was either sober or his or her intoxication was unknown. Ironically, it should be added that in a few cases, the reason for the argument was the initial claim by one party that the other one drinks too much alcohol.

There were twelve robbery followed by death cases; all of them were committed by male perpetrators. A total of 17 persons were convicted and 13 killed in these crimes. Most of the killings were committed by one perpetrator but there were two with two and one with four perpetrators.

Robbery homicides committed by strangers are rather rare in Estonia: there were only two cases that were categorized as such; most killings were committed by persons who knew their victims in some way. The closest relationship was identified in a case where a young male killed his grandmother.

As a distinction from domestic and argument-based homicide cases, most of the robberies followed by death cases occur in public or semi-public places. Still, the role of alcohol remains important for these cases: in half of the cases, both the victim and perpetrator were drunk; in two cases, the perpetrator was drunk and the victim sober; and in three cases, both parties were sober.

Other cases in our dataset, not classifiable as domestic, argument related, or robbery related, were still similar to those already described: they were mostly single perpetrator – single victim cases that involved alcohol and were committed between males who knew each other.

Homicide-Suicide

Between 2007 and 2010, there were four homicide-suicide cases³ in Estonia. They were all committed by male perpetrators and they all included the killing of the intimate partner. The intimate partner was the sole victim in two cases, but in one case, the perpetrator also killed his two daughters, and in one case, also a daughter and his wife's friend.

Alcohol did not play a role in one of the cases, but for two cases, the victims had been drinking alcohol, and in one case, the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the killing. All of the killings took place in apartments and in only one case, the perpetrator killed himself some hours later elsewhere. The modus operandi included stabbing (2 times), strangulation, and shooting.

Location

In Estonia, homicide rarely takes place in public space. Most of the incidents occur in apartments, summer cottages, or other dwelling houses. This includes victims' and perpetrators' houses and houses of their relatives, friends, or acquaintances.

Homicide in public space is usually committed on streets by stabbing or beating but even in this case, the victim and perpetrator often knew each other as was previously described in the case of robberies. Each year, there are cases where homicide is committed in a dormitory or other social housing estate, also not very random are the cases where homicide is committed in abandoned buildings where homeless people gather. The poor living conditions probably go hand-in-hand with other social problems.

³ Homicide-suicide cases were not included in court data as these cases did not reach the court because there was no one to accuse and therefore the proceedings were ended by the prosecutor.

Modus Operandi

Among the methods of killing, the most common is stabbing; very often a kitchen knife is used for that purpose. Stabbing was a method of killing in 44% of cases. This refers to the expressiveness and randomness of the events, as people rarely carry a knife on themselves, but during an argument in an apartment and while intoxicated, an accidentally found knife or other sharp instrument may seem to be an easy way to end the quarrel. Stabbing is often preceded by beating.

Stabbing used to be the most common way of killing in the middle of the nineties, when it accounted for 37% of killings (Lehti, 1997). The increase to 44% is relative and mainly caused by diminished usage of other methods (e.g., shooting).

Beating is the second most common way of killing (28%); it often involves more than one perpetrator. While with beating it is harder to cause lethal damage, it is more common in these cases that a victim is left dying as the perpetrator does not understand the level of damage he has caused. In these cases, there has sometimes been a previous history of violence between the perpetrator and the victim, and the use of violence as a method of conflict resolution has been considered normal by both parties.

After stabbing and beating, a wide array of blunt instruments, from spades to chairs, are used (14%). Killing with firearms (6%) has become rather unusual in comparison with homicides in the 1990s when there were 32% of homicides committed with firearms and the proportion of killings with the motive for robbery or revenge was also higher (Lehti, 1997). The diminished number of guns in private ownership has probably played a role in this reduction, but it is more likely that general societal changes have had a bigger role.

The share of killings by strangulation or suffocation was 6%; homicides through setting a victim or a house on fire accounted for 3%.

Victim Characteristics

Mortality statistics give a historical overview of homicide victims' gender and age. Data we have gathered have a shorter timeline but provide more detailed information about the victims of homicides in Estonia.

The data on mortality from the last two decades show that males constitute between 70 and 80% of homicide victims. Before and after the years of extremely high homicide levels in the 1990s, the age structure of homicide victims has been relatively stable, with no clear peaks (Fig. 27.4 - see Appendix, pg. 495 or online at extras.springer.com).

In the first half of the 1990s, victimization among males in the age range of 20–49 years increased drastically but decreased substantially by the end of the decade, according to mortality statistics. One of the reasons for this increase was high criminality and frequent conflicts between criminal groups. According to Lehti (1997), during the years 1994–1996, every fifth male victim in his 20s or 30s was killed due to conflicts among criminals. Middle-aged men have most often been killed in the course of impulsive conflicts, usually family and drinking quarrels. As shown before, the conflicts between criminal groups have become very rare, and, at the same time, the mortality rates of young males have become lower as well. Now, differences in the rates of mortality between age groups are almost nonexistent. Changes in female victimization rates are limited and the differences between age groups are much smaller and inconsistent than in the past (Fig. 27.3).

Slavic-origin males are more likely to be victims of homicide when compared to Estonians according to the data from 2007 to 2010. As many as 75% of homicide victims were male, with 25% of victims being female. Based on nationality, we found 64% to be of Russian or other Slavic background; Estonians accounted for 34% of victims, and other nationalities, 2%.

Excluding the victims whose intoxication was unknown, 80% of victims were intoxicated when they were killed. The share of intoxicated victims was higher among males (85%) and Slavic-origin victims (86%).

Perpetrator Characteristics

In Estonia, as elsewhere, homicide is a male-dominated offense. During the period 2007–2010, there were, in total, 113 males and 7 females convicted of homicide. Most of the homicides took place between males (69%); killings where a male kills a female account for 23%. In comparison

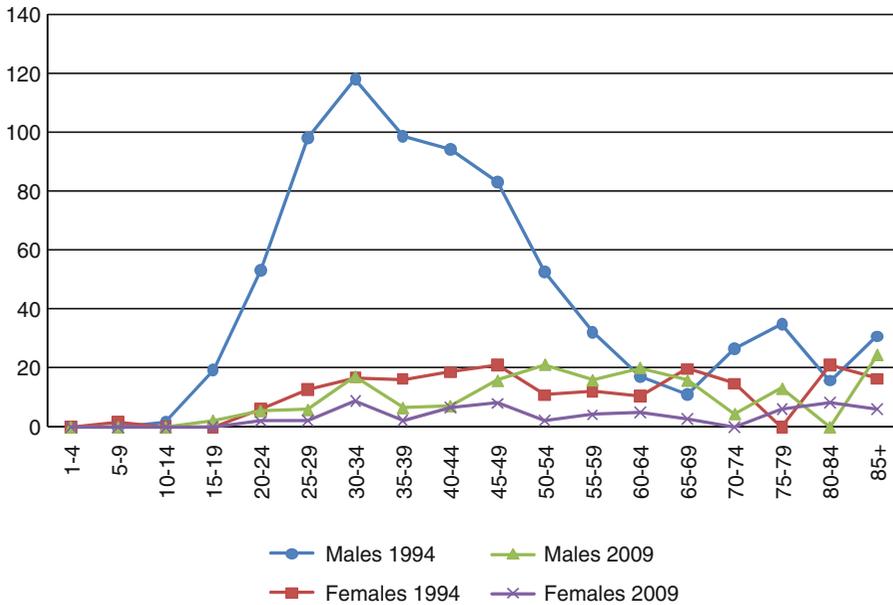


Fig. 27.3 The age structure of male and female homicide victims according to mortality statistics in 1994 and 2009, per 100,000 inhabitants

with previous decades, the proportion of females among perpetrators has diminished. In 1997, Lehti noted that from the 1960s (until the mid-1990s), females accounted for 10% of homicide perpetrators, while between 2007 and 2010, they accounted for only 6%. All known female homicides in our dataset were either domestic or argument-based homicides, in four cases, a female perpetrator killed a male, and in two cases, a female, victim.

The average age of perpetrators was 35 years, the age at the time of offense varied between 16 and 79. There were seven young offenders who committed their offenses while they were less than 18 years of age.

Immigrant nationals, mostly of Russian or other Slavic origin, are overrepresented and constitute more than half of the perpetrators (58%). Since the 1980s, the proportion of homicides between Estonians and other nationalities has not changed a lot, and it can still be concluded that different national groups tend to kill their counterparts. In 75% of homicides, the nationality of the perpetrator and the victim was the same, but there were twice as many killings among Russians

than among Estonians. The remaining 25% were homicides between different national groups and there were more cases where an Estonian killed a Russian-origin person than vice versa. We also noticed that, among immigrants, there were more previously convicted perpetrators and their average age was higher in comparison with Estonians.

Although the share of immigrants is higher among homicide perpetrators, there are no differences between national groups in terms of the motive; the share of domestic homicide is almost equal between Estonians and Russians. The same observation was made by Lehti (1997) and it can be argued that the lifestyle and habits of different national groups are similar in Estonia, but due to several reasons, the number of non-Estonians who have economic and social difficulties is higher. This is reflected in the fact that Estonians perceived economic well-being to have been higher for more than a decade; in 2008, for example, 42% of Estonians and 60% of non-Estonians stated that they have great difficulties with everyday subsistence (Statistics Estonia, 2010). Statistics also show that men have more difficulties with

subsistence in Estonia and the difference between the sexes is bigger for non-Estonians (Statistics Estonia).

Those who commit homicide tend to be less educated; more than half of perpetrators had 9 or less years of schooling. Even more problematic was the situation with employment – 80% of perpetrators did not work. Apart from problems arising from the low social status in general, we found that in most of the cases, the perpetrators were single (77%) and had a previous conviction (61%).

These characteristics give a portrait of socially deprived, middle-aged men, of whom a large proportion have been convicted before, and, as mentioned previously, might struggle with alcohol abuse.

Explanations for Homicide Specific to Estonia

Mechanisms linking long-term socio-economic deprivation to social exclusion, combined with hazardous drinking patterns seem to be the main risk factors for deadly violence in Estonia. Perpetrators and victims of homicide coincide largely as a group in Estonia. A middle-aged, Russian-speaking, unemployed and poorly educated man from Tallinn or from an economically deprived area of north-east Estonia was the most frequent portrait in analyzed court case materials.

Economic and social turmoil following the collapse of the Soviet Union and radical transformation of society in the beginning of the 1990s changed the lives of all inhabitants. Immigrants who had enjoyed privileges during the Soviet time were suddenly facing a situation where they did not have citizenship of any state and their opportunities to find work were diminished as many of the big industries were shut down. Although the economic and social well-being of ethnic minorities, mainly Russians, has continuously improved since the 1990s, it has not reached the level of Estonians. The population of Russians in Estonia has clustered in certain areas where they often constitute the majority. This has been

an obstacle for integration and therefore the social lives of Estonians and Russians mostly do not coincide. It is also reflected in the fact that most of the homicides are intra-ethnic.

At the same time, it is still obvious that homicide is a crime of non-Estonians: whilst they are responsible for 60% of violent deaths, the share of non-Estonians in population is only 30%. As the majority of non-Estonians are Russians, one should take into account the fact that in Russia, during the last decade, the homicide rate has been more than twice as high in comparison to Estonia (Federal State Statistics Service, 2011).

In relation to alcohol use, Estonia resembles other Eastern-European countries, including Russia, where in comparison to many Western-European countries, drinking habits are more hazardous (Bye, 2008; Perlman, 2010). People are more prone to drink strong spirits in large quantities and this is more likely to result in drunkenness that substantially decreases a person's ability to control his actions. In this chapter, we have shown that most of the homicides have an expressive nature, occur as a result of disputes, and are likely to be unintentional. Being unconscious of one's actions does not lessen the tragedy of the event or the responsibility of the perpetrator, but this pattern of homicide shows that for society in general, the problem of homicide is concentrated to a specific vulnerable group and might be prevented at least to some extent by restrictions on alcohol consumption.

The risk of becoming a victim of homicide in public space by a stranger is very low in Estonia. Whilst the majority of people are safe in terms of risk of being a victim of homicide, there seems to be a part of society that has drifted. From court materials, we noticed that heavy drinking, violence as a method of communication embedded in poor living conditions, and a lack of social interaction beyond immediate family or friends lead to lethal violence. At an individual level, this goes hand-in-hand with unemployment, previous criminal records, lack of educational skills, and addiction to alcohol and drugs. Although all these factors play a role in people's decision to commit violence, the unique common factor on the incident-level is alcohol – if the perpetrators hadn't been

drinking, a large share of homicides would never have taken place.

Policies Specific to Estonia

There is, for the time being, no specific program devoted to the reduction of homicide in the country. Homicide was more often in the agenda of the government in the 1990s, when there were more instrumental killings that took place in public places and therefore generated public fear.

In 2009, the government adopted a strategy for violence reduction, but it focused on topics that are only partly connected to the prevention of lethal violence, such as the use of restraining orders and the helping and empowerment of the victims of violence. Guidelines for the development of criminal policy also refer to the topic only indirectly.

The government policy agenda for diminishing alcohol consumption and alcohol-related deaths has been rather liberal. Alcohol is easily available throughout the country and alcoholism is seen more as a consequence of social problems, not as a problem per se. This may change in the near future because of a growing concern about alcohol-related injuries due to traffic accidents, fires, and drowning.

The clearance rate for homicide has been 80% on average in recent years; it used to be less in the 1990s due to the more complex nature of offenses and resources available to police.

The penal policy is not very strict on homicide; although there is a minimum sentence for homicides, there are no sentencing guidelines. The possible length of imprisonment is 6–15 years for manslaughter and 8 years to life imprisonment for murder. There is still a possibility for a judge to impose a sentence below the minimum set by law, but these cases are very exceptional. There has been one case in recent years when the sentence for manslaughter was below the minimum. Maximum prison sentence for manslaughter has been imposed once during recent years. For murder, maximum sentences in recent years have reached 20 years of imprisonment. Life sentences for murder have been rare; one has to kill

several people in order to be sentenced to life. At the end of the year 2010, there are 36 homicide offenders serving their life sentences in Estonian prisons (Ahven, 2010).

The average prison sentence given by the court is 7 years of imprisonment for manslaughter and 12 years for murder. In reality, the perpetrators serve less time in prison, since many of them are released prematurely under parole. Although there have been cases when a prematurely released homicide offender kills another person while free, the rates of re-arrest during the year after release have been low (around 10%) in comparison to other violent offenders released from prison (Ahven, Salla, & Vahtrus, 2010).

As the problem of homicide is concentrated to a small segment of society (often the poor and excluded) and incidents that come to the attention of media and public are exceptional, it is unlikely that a policy directed to prevent lethal violence in the near future will take place in the country. If the scenario changes, policy initiatives should incorporate both the role of long-term socio-economic exclusions of certain groups in society and lifestyle factors (particularly, alcohol consumption, and abuse) that directly affect homicide levels in Estonia.

References

- Ahven, A. (2000). Social problems in official statistics in Estonia in the 1980s and 1990s. In H. Leifman & N. Edgren Henrichson (Eds.), *Statistics on alcohol, drugs and crime in the Baltic Sea region*. NAD publication, 37, Helsinki.
- Ahven, A. (2010). *Eluaegsete kinnipeetavate ennetähtaegne vabastamine [Release of prisoners sentenced for life]*. Tallinn: Justiitsministeerium.
- Ahven, A., Salla, J., & Vahtrus, S. (2010). *Recidivism in Estonia*. Estonian Ministry of Justice. Tallinn. Retrieved February 5, 2011, from <http://www.just.ee/recidivism>
- Bye, E. K. (2008). Alcohol and homicide in Eastern Europe: A time series analysis of six countries. *Homicide Studies*, 12, 7–27.
- Ceccato, V. (2008). Expressive crimes in post-socialist states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention*, 9, 2–30.
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2010). *The World Factbook: Estonia*. Retrieved October 20, 2010, from <https://>

- www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-fact-book/geos/en.html.
- Eesti Inimvara Raport [Estonian Human Resource Report]. (2010). Eesti Koostöö Kogu.
- Eesti Konjunktuuriinstituut. (2010). *Alcohol market, consumption and harms in Estonia, yearbook 2010*. Tallinn: Estonian Institute of Economic Research.
- European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics. (2003). Second ed. Den Haag: WODC.
- Federal State Statistics Service. (2011). *Death rates by main classes of causes of death*. Retrieved January 15, 2011, from http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b10_12/IssWWW.exe/stg/d01/05-07.htm.
- Kim, S. W., & Pridemore, W. A. (2005). Social change, institutional anomie, and serious property crime in transitional Russia. *British Journal of Criminology*, 45(1), 81–97.
- Kuritegevus Eestis. (2009). [Crime in Estonia 2009] 2010. Tallinn: Justiitsministeerium.
- Lehti, M. (1997). *Viron henkirikollisuus 1990-luvulla. English summary: Homicides in Estonia in the 1990s*. Oikeuspoliittisen tutkimuslaitoksen julkaisuja 148. Helsinki.
- Lehti, M. (1998). *Tahtlikud tapmised Eestis [Intentional killings in Estonia]*. Tallinn: Sisekaitseakadeemia kirjastus.
- Lehti, M. (2001). Homicide trends in Estonia, 1971–1996. In H. Ylikangas, P. Karonen, & M. Lehti (Eds.), *Five centuries of violence in Finland and the Baltic area* (pp. 133–192). Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Leps, A. (1991). Kuritegevus Eestis [Crime in Estonia]. Tartu: Tartu Ülikool and Eesti Akadeemiline Õigusteaduse Selts.
- Messner, S. F., & Rosenfeld, R. (1997). Political restraint of the market and levels of criminal homicide: A cross National Application of Institutional Anomie theory. *Social Forces*, 75, 1393–1416.
- Perlman, F. J. (2010). Drinking in transition: Trends in alcohol consumption in Russia 1994–2004. *BMC Public Health*, 10, 691.
- Popova, S., Rehm, J., Patra, J., & Zatonski, W. (2007). Comparing alcohol consumption in central and Eastern Europe to other European countries. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, 42, 465–473.
- Pridemore, W. A., & Eckhardt, K. (2008). A comparison of victim, offender, and event characteristics of alcohol and non-alcohol-related homicides. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 45, 227–255.
- Raid, K. (1939). Politseiliselt registreeritud süütegevus 1938 [Police registered crime in 1938]. *Eesti Statistika [Estonian Statistics]*, 212, 402–411.
- Riigi Statistika Keskbüroo (1937). Eesti arvudes 1920–1935 [Estonia in Numbers 1920–1935]. Tallinn: Riigi Statistika Keskbüroo
- Saar, J., Markina, A., Ahven, A., Annist, A., Riigi Statistika Keskbüroo & Ginter, J. (2003). *Kuritegevus Eestis 1991–2001* [Crime in Estonia 1991–2001]. Tallinn: TPÜ Rahvusvaheliste ja Sotsiaaluurinute Instituut and EV Justiitsministeerium.
- Salla, J. (2010). Fear of crime, security and security measures. In J. Salla (Ed.), *Crime victim survey 2009*. Tallinn: Justiitsministeerium. Retrieved January 15, 2011, from www.just.ee/victim.
- Salla, J., & Surva, L. (2010). Violence and victims. In J. Salla (Ed.), *Crime victim survey 2009*. Tallinn: Justiitsministeerium. Retrieved January 15, 2011, from www.just.ee/victim.
- Salla, J., & Tammiste, B. (2009). *Vägivallakuritegevus* [Violent crime]. In Kuritegevus Eestis 2008 [Crime in Estonia 2008] (pp. 23–32). Tallinn: Justiitsministeerium.
- Statistics Estonia (2009). Immigrants in Estonia. Tallinn. Retrieved August 23, 2010, from <http://www.stat.ee/index.php?id=31390&highlight=immigrant, population>
- Statistics Estonia. (2010). Data retrieved November 20, 2010, from www.stat.ee.
- Stickley, A., & Mäkinen, I. H. (2005). Homicide in the Russian empire and Soviet Union: Continuity or change? *British Journal of Criminology*, 45, 647–670.
- Susi, A. (1926). Kuritegevus Eestis 1919–1924 [Crime in Estonia 1919–1924]. *Eesti Statistika [Estonian Statistics]*, 58, 1–7.
- Urvaste, H. (1995). Aastal Eesti Vabariigis toimepandud tapmistest [On homicides committed in Estonia in 1994]. *Juridica*, 2, 50–53.
- van Dijk, J., van Kesteren, J., & Smit, P. (2007). *Criminal victimisation in international perspective*. Den Haag: WODC.