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CRIMINOLOGY

HOMICIDE VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS: AN ISRAELI STUDY†

SIMHA F. LANDAU,* ISRAEL DRAPKIN** AND SHLOMO ARAD***

Although criminal homicide has been the subject of numerous investigations, the number of empirical studies is limited.¹ The basic methodological assumption underlying this article is that the act of homicide cannot be explained by any simple, broad, unitary variable. Rather, it must be viewed as the consequence of involvement with and interaction of a variety of variables. The purpose of this study is to identify these variables and to assess the relative contribution of each to the resultant act of criminal homicide.

The analysis is limited to several characteristics of the victim and the offender in a homicide. First, a brief description of the general findings of the study will be presented. Then, more detailed data will be presented relative to the sex and ethnic origin of both victim and offender, the victim-offender relationship, and the motives involved in the criminal homicide.²

The subjects of this study were the 279 offenders³

† This paper presents findings from a multivariate study on criminal homicide in Israel, parts of which were presented at the Sixth International Congress on Criminology, Madrid, September 1970. The project was supported in part by a grant from the Ford Foundation, and was conducted by the Institute of Criminology, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

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¹ For an extensive bibliography, see M. WOLFGANG, *PATTERNS IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE* (1958); M. WOLFGANG & F. FERRACUTI, *THE SUBCULTURE OF VIOLENCE* (1967).

² For the statistical analysis of data, Wilks' G Independence Test was utilized: $G > \chi^2_{(r-1)(s-1), .95}$. S. WILKS, *MATHEMATICAL STATISTICS* (1962).

³ Five offenders were foreign sailors or tourists and were not included in tables dealing with ethnic origin. For some variables, the information does not cover all

and 311 victims involved in criminal homicide in Israel between January 1, 1950 and December 31, 1964. The analysis excludes only those homicides which were committed by infiltrators from neighboring Arab countries. The primary sources of information for this study were the files of the Israeli Police and the Israeli Prison Service.

In this analysis, comparisons of oriental Jewish, western Jewish and non-Jewish (mainly Arab) offenders are made.⁴ These comparisons derive from the hypothesis that the influence of cultural norms and traditions on behavior will be clearly reflected in the crime of homicide in Israel.

The results indicate that the relative representation of non-Jews among homicide offenders and victims is more than six times the corresponding representation of Jews. Among Jewish homicide offenders, the relative representation of oriental Jews is almost twice that of western Jews. Homicide followed by suicide is especially characteristic of western Jews (28 per cent of the cases in this ethnic group). Among western Jews it is fourteen times higher than among non-Jews (2 per cent) and 2.5 times higher than among oriental Jews (11 per cent).

Sex of Victim and Offender

Tables 1 and 2 present the sex distribution among victims and offenders. The data show that

the cases. Thus, the number of cases in the subsequent tables may total fewer than 279.

⁴ These groups are specifically defined as follows:

1. *Oriental Jewish offenders*: Those born in Asia or Africa or born in Israel to parents whose origin is in Asia or Africa.

2. *Western Jewish offenders*: Those born in Europe or America, or born in Israel to parents whose origin is in Europe or America.

3. *Non-Jewish offenders*: Most of the offenders in this group are Moslem Arabs while some are Christian Arabs or Druzes. (Culturally speaking, these three groups have much in common and are organic elements of the oriental native society of the Middle East.)

It is essential to be aware of the fact that the vast majority of both western and oriental Jewish offenders were immigrants (87.9 per cent and 86.5 per cent, respectively) as was the majority of the Jewish population in the country during the period covered by the study.

TABLE I

SEX OF VICTIM, BY ETHNIC ORIGIN OF OFFENDER
(Figures in Percentages)

	Oriental Jews	Western Jews	Non- Jews	Total
Male	51.1	49.2	66.4	57.1
Female	48.8	50.8	33.6	42.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	(86)	(65)	(113)	(264)

G = 6.9146; d.f. = 2; p < .05

TABLE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF OFFENDERS, BY SEX AND
ETHNIC ORIGIN

(Figures in Percentages)

	Oriental Jews	Western Jews	Non-Jews	Total
Male	91.2	86.4	92.3	90.5
Female	8.8	13.6	7.7	9.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	(91)	(66)	(117)	(274)

G = 1.6999; d.f. = 2; n.s.

the participation of females as victims (43 per cent) is almost five times greater than their participation as offenders (9 per cent). These findings are especially interesting when compared with those of other recent studies in this field: the Philadelphia study,⁵ the Houston study,⁶ the Chicago study,⁷ the study of the Southern Province of Ceylon⁸ and a study of murder in England.⁹ In all of these studies, including the present, the majority of offenders were males, and the percentage of females among victims was higher than that among offenders.

These two findings are in accord with basic generalizations in criminology regarding "typical" offenses of males and females. Beyond these two common features, however, some interesting differ-

⁵ M. WOLFGANG, PATTERNS IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE (1958).

⁶ Pokorny, *A Comparison of Homicide in Two Cities*, 56 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 479 (1965).

⁷ Voss & Hepburn, *Patterns in Criminal Homicide in Chicago*, 59 J. CRIM. L.C. & P.S. 499 (1968).

⁸ C. JAYEWARDENE & H. RANASINGHE, CRIMINAL HOMICIDE IN THE SOUTHERN PROVINCE (1963).

⁹ E. GIBSON & S. KLEIN, MURDER (1961).

ences exist among the six studies under discussion. Although in the English study the majority of victims (60 per cent) were females, in the other five studies, females comprised fewer than half of the victims: 43 per cent in Israel, 26 per cent in Chicago, 24 per cent in Philadelphia, 20 per cent in Houston and 16 per cent in Ceylon. Analysis of the rate of females as offenders finds Houston to be the highest (24 per cent), followed by England (22 per cent), Philadelphia (18 per cent), Chicago (17 per cent), Israel (9 per cent) and Ceylon (5 per cent).

In order to compare the varying participation of females as victims and as offenders, the following ratio was computed:

$$\frac{\text{percentage of females among victims}}{\text{percentage of females among offenders}}$$

The data indicate that the gap between the passive and active role of females in homicide is the greatest in the two oriental countries—Israel (4.8) and Ceylon (3.2)—while England is third (2.7). In the American cities, however, somewhat more of a balance exists between female victims and female offenders (1.5 in Chicago; 1.3 in Philadelphia; and 0.8 in Houston).

As shown in Table 1, a significant difference exists among the three ethnic groups of offenders relative to sex of victim. Only 34 per cent of the victims of non-Jewish offenders were females, while on the other hand, western Jews killed more females (51 per cent) than males (49 per cent). Oriental Jews were similar to western Jews in this respect in that 49 per cent of the victims were females.

When the sex of the offender is considered (see Table 2), no significant differences are found in the distribution of ethnic groups. After computing the above-mentioned ratio for each ethnic group separately, it is determined that among offenders of oriental origin the gap between the participation of females as victims and their participation as offenders is greater than among offenders of western origin. Oriental Jews (5.4) are followed by non-Jews (4.25) and western Jewish offenders (3.6). This finding is an additional indicator of the deep and characteristic differences among the three ethnic groups in this study.

The significantly low proportion of female victims among non-Jewish offenders (see Table 1) can be better understood if the custom of bride-price is taken into consideration. The traditional custom of paying bride-price to the parents or relatives of the bride is almost universal in the Arab population of

the Middle East, including Israel. According to this custom, a female means property. As a result, poor Arab youngsters may have to postpone their marriage for years until they save enough money to "buy" themselves a wife. The "property value" of a female, however, is not the supreme value of the Arab culture. The good name of the family must be considered as a greater and more important value in the Arab normative system. Thus, an Arab may not hesitate to kill a sister who brings shame on the name of the family by her immoral behavior.

This cultural aspect will be discussed in more detail when motives are analyzed. The fact that this culture attaches direct property-value to the female, however, may be a contributory factor to the relatively low rate of females among the victims of non-Jewish offenders. This conclusion is based on the fact that homicide is almost always an intra-ethnic group affair.

Ethnic Origin of Victim and Offender

In 88 per cent of the cases, the victim and the offender were members of the same ethnic group (234 out of 267 cases). When the comparison is made between Jews and non-Jews only, it is discovered that in 95 per cent of the homicide cases, Jews were killed by Jews and non-Jews were killed by other non-Jews (254 out of 267). This finding is also in accord with the results of Wolfgang,¹⁰ Pokorny¹¹ and Voss and Hepburn.¹² Homicide, therefore, can be considered an almost exclusively intra-ethnic phenomenon, and as such provides clues to the basic characteristic of the offense. That is, homicide is a crime which occurs among people bound by what can be defined as primary relationships.

The Victim-Offender Relationship

Table 3 presents the differential frequencies of fourteen types of relationships. Analysis of the total distribution reveals that the majority of relationships are characteristic of primary group contacts. Family relationship alone (see categories 1-6 in Table 3) account for 42 per cent of the cases. In fact, the only categories which exclude primary group relationships are: stranger, enemy, sex rival, and members of rival clans. The total of these categories comprises only 35 per cent of the relationships. All other categories (65 per cent) imply

¹⁰ M. WOLFGANG, *PATTERNS IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE* (1958).

¹¹ Pokorny, *supra* note 6.

¹² Voss & Hepburn, *supra* note 7.

TABLE 3
VICTIM-OFFENDER RELATIONSHIP BY ETHNIC ORIGIN
OF OFFENDER (IN PER CENT)

	Oriental Jews	Western Jews	Non- Jews	Total
1. Offender Parent of Victim	7.7	12.3	7.8	8.9
2. Victim Parent of Offender	4.4	3.1	2.6	3.3
3. Brother or Sister	1.1	—	13.0	5.9
4. Other Family Blood-Relationship	2.2	—	5.2	3.0
5. Marriage Partner	25.2	21.5	5.2	15.9
6. Other Family-Relationship by Marriage	4.4	3.1	7.0	5.2
7. Paramour, Mistress	1.1	6.2	0.9	2.2
8. Sex Rival	2.2	7.7	3.5	4.1
9. Friend, Acquaintance	6.6	6.2	7.0	6.6
10. Neighbor	5.5	6.2	4.3	5.2
11. Member of Rival Clan	6.6	—	13.0	7.7
12. Business Relationship	9.9	12.3	6.1	8.9
13. Enemy	1.1	1.5	8.7	4.4
14. Stranger	22.0	20.0	15.7	18.8
Total	100.0	100.1	100.0	100.1
N	(91)	(65)	(115)	(271)

primary relationships either by definition (e.g., marriage partner) or by probability (e.g., neighbor). Table 3 shows that only slight differences exist between oriental and western Jewish offenders, while on the other hand, some remarkable differences exist between Jewish and non-Jewish offenders.

Table 4 presents a list of selected relationships in which most differences exist. This table shows that sibling relationships (in most cases the victim is the offender's sister) are approximately twenty times more frequent among non-Jewish offenders than among Jewish offenders. When the relationship is membership in rival clans, the rate of non-Jewish offenders is 3.4 times higher than that of Jewish offenders. When the relationship is that of enemy, the rate of non-Jewish offenders is 6.7 times higher than that of Jewish offenders. Conversely, the tendency of Jews to murder their marriage partner (in most cases husband murders wife) is 4.6 times greater than the corresponding tendency of non-

TABLE 4

SELECTED VICTIM-OFFENDER RELATIONSHIPS, BY
ETHNIC ORIGIN OF OFFENDER (IN PER CENT)*

	Jews	Non-Jews	Total
3. Brother or Sister	0.6	13.0	5.9
5. Marriage Partner	23.7	5.2	15.9
7., 8. Paramour, Mistress or Sex Rival	7.7	4.3	6.3
11. Member of Rival Clan	3.8	13.0	7.7
13. Enemy	1.3	8.7	4.4
Total	37.1	44.2	40.2
N	(58)	(51)	(109)

G = 65.2048; d.f. = 4; p < .001

* The percentages refer to the total frequencies of the columns in Table 3.

Jews. Further, when the relationship between offender and victim is either paramour, mistress or sex rival, the rate of Jewish offenders is almost twice (1.8) the rate of non-Jewish offenders. All of these differential distributions are statistically significant.

The extremely low rate of non-Jewish offenders who murder their marriage partner is attributable to several factors. First, as already noted, because of the custom of bride-price in Arab society a direct property-value is attached to a woman. This fact may have a latent effect on the generally low rate of female victims among non-Jewish offenders and, in particular, the low rate of victims who are marriage partners. However, better explanations exist for this phenomenon. One of the most striking differences between traditional Arab society and western society (represented in this study by the western Jews) is in the attitude toward women. In Arab society, the male plays the dominant role. The male is considered the omnipotent master of his family—both as husband and as father. Two relevant and important reflections of this situation in Moslem traditional law are the legal possibility for a husband to take up to four wives and the extremely simple and easy procedure required for a husband to divorce his wife.¹³ Thus, the Arab wife, especially if Moslem, plays a more passive and inferior role to that of the western Jewish wife. Consequently, the probability of sharp marital disputes

¹³ Although these two marital privileges of the Moslem male were legally abolished by Israeli law, they still reflect the place of the woman in traditional Arab society.

and conflicts between husband and wife is greatly diminished among Arab Moslem couples.

It is also necessary to consider oriental Jewish offenders. Because they are mostly immigrants and come from cultures in which the woman is much inferior to the man, it is expected that oriental Jewish offenders show a pattern similar to that of the non-Jewish offenders. As shown in Table 3, however, the percentage of marriage partners among victims of oriental Jews is slightly higher than the corresponding percentage among western Jews. The explanation for this finding probably lies in the sharp cultural transition which the oriental Jews experienced when immigrating to Israel. This sudden leap from an oriental traditional culture to a western-oriented, absorbing society has had an inevitable effect on the internal structure of the family.

Two other complementary changes have also taken place. First, the oriental Jewish father no longer retains his previous status and control over his family. Second, the wife, now influenced by the prevailing norms, frequently works outside the home. These facts increase her status and manifest her wish for greater equality. The most extreme consequence of the tensions resulting from these changes is the slaying of marriage partners. Yet, this cultural change has had a greater impact on the criminality of immigrants in Israel.¹⁴

Despite the differences between Jewish and non-Jewish offenders relative to victim-offender relationships, one important inter-ethnic consistency does exist. It has already been observed that the first six categories in Table 3 are all indicative of family relationships (either by marriage or blood ties), and that some salient ethnic differences were found in several of these categories (particularly in categories 3 and 5). Despite these differences, however, in each of the three ethnic groups, family relationships comprise almost the same proportion of the total relationships. The percentage of cases in categories 1-6 in Table 3 among oriental Jewish offenders is 45 per cent, while among western Jewish offenders it is 40 per cent and among non-Jewish offenders is 41 per cent.

We may conclude, therefore, that cultural norms and ethnic origin influence the choice of specific relatives as homicide victims, but do not affect the proportion of family members among the total number of homicide victims.

¹⁴ Shoham, *The Application of the "Culture Conflict" Hypothesis to the Criminality of Immigrants in Israel*, 53 J. Crim. L.C. & P.S. 207 (1962).

TABLE 5
MOTIVE IN CRIMINAL HOMICIDE, BY ETHNIC ORIGIN OF OFFENDER (IN PER CENT)

	Oriental Jews	Western Jews	Non-Jews	Total
1. Protecting the Name of the Family and Blood Feud	6.9	—	19.0	10.3
2. Personal Conflict or Altercation (insult, curse, jostling)	13.8	8.7	21.6	15.8
3. Mass Conflict or Altercation	2.3	—	12.9	6.3
4. Marriage Conflict	12.6	8.7	2.6	7.4
5. Altercation over Money	6.9	10.1	4.3	6.6
6. Romantic Revenge, Unrequited Love, Sexual Rivalry	13.8	18.8	9.5	13.2
7. Commission of Another Crime (Robbery, etc.)	4.6	7.2	6.0	5.9
8. Self Defense	1.1	—	2.6	1.5
9. Aiding a Crime of Homicide	3.4	—	3.4	2.6
10. Concealing Birth	5.7	1.4	4.3	4.0
11. Mental Disease*	18.4	24.6	4.3	14.0
12. Other	10.3	20.3	9.5	12.5
Total	99.8	99.8	100.0	100.1
N	(87)	(69)	(116)	(272)

G = 75.7418; d.f. = 16**; p < .001

* In our opinion, when a person who commits a homicide is declared to lack mental responsibility for his deeds, it is impossible to judge his behavior from the normal motivational point of view. In such a case, if the question is asked: "Why did he slay his victim?" the answer must be because of his mental illness and not because of a marriage conflict or personal insult. The basic assumption in these cases is that if not for the mental illness, the same offender being in the same situation would not have committed this crime.

** For the computation of G categories 8, 9 and 12 were excluded: the first two because of their small frequencies and the third because it is a collection of miscellaneous and unknown motives.

Motives

An attempt to classify motives inevitably creates several problems. For example, every individual has a unique personality and, accordingly, behaves in a characteristic fashion. Both personality and behavior are a product of inborn traits, cultural background, and unique prior experiences. Therefore, any effort to classify different behavior patterns into a limited number of categories—motives in this case—must result in loss of information. The missing information is the price paid for systematic and comprehensive reduction and analysis of data.

A second problem is that the primary motive for the homicide may be situational and may not always reflect the inner motive which led one person to slay another. Twelve motives have been classified and identified in this study. Some concisely describe the basic motive underlying the fatal behavior (e.g., protecting the name of the family, self defense and concealing birth) while others can be seen more as a label describing a situation (e.g., mass conflict or altercation and marriage conflict). Mass conflict or altercation is simply an indicator of the number of individuals taking part in the al-

tercation. "Marriage conflict" shows only that the supposed origin of the homicide was a problem rooted in marital life.¹⁵ In this respect, this study faced some of the same difficulties described by Bohannan in his attempt to analyze the motives of homicide among African tribes according to the American classification of Wolfgang.¹⁶

Despite the motivational categories, however, they are all intended to answer the fundamental question of the reason for the homicide. As shown in Table 5, the type of motive indicated varies significantly.

The discussion of motives immediately following analysis of victim-offender relationships is not merely coincidental. As data indicate, the relationship between the victim and the offender is significantly associated with the motive. Frequently, it is the primary determinant of the motive. The following four examples from the data support this

¹⁵ In the present study, "marriage conflict" includes (mainly among non-Jews but to some extent among oriental Jews) marital disputes, quarrels over bride-price and quarrels with in-laws.

¹⁶ See P. BOHANNAN, *AFRICAN HOMICIDE AND SUICIDE* (1960).

conclusions. First, when the motive of homicide was the protection of the family's good name, the sibling relationship (brother killing sister) appeared in 52 per cent of all cases. Second, in 50 per cent of the cases of blood feud and in 68 per cent of the cases of mass conflict, the victim and the offender belonged to rival clans. Third, in 75 per cent of the cases of both marriage conflict and romantic revenge, victims were marriage partners of offenders. Finally, in all cases in which homicide occurred during the commission of another crime, the victim and the offender were strangers to each other.

As Table 5 indicates, the most frequent motives are personal conflict or altercation (16 per cent); mental disease (14 per cent); romantic revenge, unrequited love and sexual rivalry (13 per cent); protecting the name of the family and blood feud (10 per cent); marriage conflict (7 per cent); altercation over money (7 per cent); concealing birth (4 per cent); aiding a crime of homicide (3 per cent); and self-defense (1 per cent).

As expected, some significant differences appear among the three ethnic groups. For example, the motives of protecting the name of the family and blood feud are 2.8 times more frequent among non-Jews than among oriental Jews. Among western Jewish offenders, these motives are completely absent. It should be observed, however, that these two motives are more deeply rooted in Arab oriental traditional culture than in the culture of oriental Jews. Also, personal conflicts or altercations among non-Jews are 2.5 times more frequent than among western Jews. Yet, they are only 1.6 times more frequent than among oriental Jews.

It should also be noted that mass conflicts or altercations are 5.6 times more frequent among non-Jews than among oriental Jews. This type of motive is also completely absent among western Jews. Mass conflict occurs mainly in communities which are divided into large family units (clans, or Arab rural settlements). One of the social duties of a clan member ("Hamula" in Arabic), is to help other clan members who may be involved in disputes with members of another clan. A consequence of this social obligation is that an altercation between two members of different Hamulas may develop into a prolonged and bitter conflict between respective Hamulas and lead to a vicious circle of homicides and blood feuds.

Marriage conflicts among oriental Jews are 4.8 times more frequent than among non-Jews. Among western Jews this motive is 3.3 times more frequent than among non-Jews. Also, altercations over

money among western Jews are 2.3 times more frequent than among non-Jews. The data indicate that Jewish offenders (especially western Jews) are over-represented in urban occupations (such as merchants) in which altercations over money are more probable and frequent and underrepresented in the rural settlements in which most non-Jewish offenders live.

It is also interesting to note that motives of a romantic nature or sexual rivalry (see category 6 in Table 5) among western Jews are 2 times more frequent than among non-Jews. At the same time, mental disease among western Jews is 5.7 times more frequent than among non-Jews. Among oriental Jews, this type of motive is only 4.3 times more frequent than among non-Jews.

Thus, two radically different motivational patterns are observed: that of western Jews and that of non-Jews. The most frequently identified motives among western Jews are: mental disease (25 per cent); "romantic" motives (19 per cent); personal conflict (9 per cent) and marriage conflict (9 per cent). Among non-Jews, the most frequent motives are: personal conflict (22 per cent); protecting the name of the family and blood feud (19 per cent); mass conflict (13 per cent); and "romantic" motives (9.5 per cent). The oriental Jewish pattern of motives is similar although not identical to that of western Jews: mental disease (18 per cent); personal conflict (14 per cent); "romantic" motives (14 per cent) and marriage conflict (13 per cent).

Conclusions

Ethnic origin proved to be an important variable in the analysis of criminal homicide cases in Israel. This finding provides support for the need of a combined psychological and socio-cultural approach to the crime of homicide. Such an approach permits the explanation of the figures relative to each of the three ethnic groups on different theoretical levels. In the case of western Jewish offenders, the psychologically oriented approach, according to which homicide is an "abnormal" violent act caused by serious personality disturbances, is the most appropriate. This argument is supported by the findings that western Jews show the lowest homicide rate of all three ethnic groups and the rate of homicide-suicide and insane cases among them is the highest of all three groups. It is also supported by the finding that victim-offender relationships and motives which are determined by

cultural norms and obligations are non-existent in this group.

On the other hand, the findings relating to non-Jewish offenders are best explained utilizing the socio-cultural approach. This approach is justified since this ethnic group experienced: the highest homicide rate, the lowest rate of homicide-suicide and of insanity and victim-offender relationships with motives that are strongly determined by traditional, normative obligations.¹⁷

The differences between these two ethnic groups actually reflect deep differences in the process of socialization—especially in the socialization of aggression.

With respect to the oriental Jewish group, the factor of immigration must be emphasized. This group experienced a sharp cultural transition when immigrating from their countries of origin to the Israeli western-oriented culture. The absorption crisis experienced by this ethnic group is reflected in the position they occupy relative to homicide: mid-way between the western Jews and the non-Jews. Since motives of protecting the name of the family and blood feud still exist, they are still influenced by traditional oriental norms of conduct.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the "subculture of violence" in the history of the Middle East and other Mediterranean countries, see T. GIBBENS & R. AHRENFELD, *CULTURAL FACTORS IN DELINQUENCY* (1966).

Also, their traditional family structure was seriously disrupted in the absorption process into the new Israeli society. Thus, in this ethnic group, the highest proportion of marriage partner victims is found and the motive of marriage conflict is most prevalent.

The relatively high proportion of mental diseases among these offenders may also be connected with the absorption crisis experienced by this group. On the other hand, the high proportion of mental diseases among western Jewish offenders seems to be less directly associated with immigration as such, and more directly related to personal pathology and suffering prior to immigration. Western Jews underwent a milder absorption crisis since they immigrated to a society in which the norms and way of life were predominantly shaped by western oriented settlers. However, these assumptions, need more empirical support.

In future analysis, therefore, other aspects of criminal homicide must be investigated—primarily variables related to the personal and social background of the offender. Moreover, attention should be focused on the dynamics of homicide-suicide and the insanity cases. The socialization process, especially the differential socialization of aggression in each of the three ethnic groups, should also be studied in order to improve understanding of this criminal phenomenon.