Homicide

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Introduction

While considerable attention has been devoted to homicide (and violent crime in general) by various sectors of the media, the subject has been relatively understudied within the realm of criminology (Levi, Maguire and Brookman, 2007). Research in the field has been dominated by US-focused studies, though there is a growing body of European scholarship (Kivivuori, Suonpää and Lehti, 2014). Existing Irish research on homicide is limited and somewhat outdated. The studies of homicide case files in the Republic of Ireland carried out by Dooley (1995, 2001), though detailed, are limited to the period from 1972 to 1996. Given that political unrest has historically been a motivating factor behind many homicides, the bulk of research in Northern Ireland has been focused on what is commonly referred to as ‘the Conflict’ or the ‘security situation’, with less analysis dedicated to non-political homicides. While international research is useful in developing an understanding of Irish homicide, any interpretation of such must take into account the social and political circumstances that are unique to the island of Ireland.

This chapter begins by briefly outlining the legal construct of homicide in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland before moving on to discuss relevant theories on homicide. Next, the broad trends in the recorded homicide figures of both jurisdictions are examined and contrasted with international patterns. The concentration of homicide in certain areas and its distribution across particular sections of the population is then considered. Finally, the impact of organised crime is discussed, and it is argued that some of the differences observed between the island of Ireland and other European countries are due to this phenomenon.

What is homicide?

While the term ‘homicide’ is most commonly associated with, or used as a synonym for, murder, it is in fact a broader term that comprises a range of offences related to unlawful death. Homicide in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland consists of the offences of Murder, Manslaughter and Infanticide (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2014a; Police Service of Northern Ireland [PSNI], 2013). In Northern Ireland, there is a further offence of Corporate
Manslaughter. Homicide in the Republic of Ireland also includes offences linked to dangerous driving causing death, while equivalent offences in Northern Ireland are classed under Other Violence with Injury. Internationally, definitions of homicide vary less than for other crime groups (Clarke, 2013). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2014) subdivides intentional homicide into three further categories, namely, Socio-political (such as terrorism), Inter-personal (including domestic incidents and male-on-male confrontational violence), and that which is related to other types of criminal activity (for example, homicides which occur during a robbery, or in the course of an organised crime group conducting its business). While these subheadings may not be part of the legal terminology of homicide, they are useful for understanding the differing motivations for such incidents.

Unlike many other crime types, the recorded figures for homicide are generally considered to be reasonably accurate reflections of what has occurred (PSNI, 2013; Office of National Statistics [ONS], 2014). Homicide is regarded as an ideal offence category for making global comparisons; incidents are typically reported to and recorded by the police, making it likely that changes in the rate over time are a reflection of actual change (Kilcommins et al., 2004; Schwartz, 2010; Clarke, 2013; UNODC, 2014). However, the category is not entirely without its ‘dark figure’; there are various scenarios in which an unlawful death may occur but may not be recorded. Brookman (2005) outlines a number of these, referring, inter alia, to missing persons and errors in identifying the cause of death. A notable UK example of the latter is that of the English doctor Harold Shipman, who killed 172 patients over a number of years, with the incidents eventually recorded as homicides in the 2002/03 figures (ONS, 2014). Missing person cases are unlikely to be recorded as homicides, given that other explanations could account for their disappearance, including intentional disappearance, suicide and accidental death or misadventure.

In some cases where the cause of death is known, the incident is not classed as a homicide because it is not widely recognised as such within a particular society. Brookman (2005: 3) argues that homicide is essentially a ‘socially constructed concept’ and is heavily mediated by perceptions of victimisation and culpability. Corporate killings, which include workplace deaths caused by negligence, are often not seen as ‘real crime’ (Brookman, 2005). In addition, deaths of civilians resulting from contact with the police are rarely recorded as homicides. A total of 1,487 deaths resulting from police contact have been identified in England and Wales, with just 13 resulting in a verdict of unlawful killing between 1990 and 2011 (Inquest, 2014a, 2014b). On the other hand, violent acts that would normally be considered abhorrent can, in certain circumstances, be legitimised; for example, terrorism may be rationalised as being a necessary tool in overthrowing oppression (Levi et al., 2007).

**Homicide and criminological theory**

As with crime more generally, there is no single criminological theory that satisfactorily or comprehensively explains the phenomena of homicide and violence. An analysis of recent European publications on homicide demonstrates that virtually all major criminological theories have been used to explain homicide patterns, though some have proven more popular than others (Kivivuori et al., 2014). Theoretical approaches have come from a variety of perspectives, including those focusing on the attributes of individuals and those considering the effects of wider forces external to the person.

Wolfgang’s (1958) study of homicide in the American city of Philadelphia made a number of observations about the distribution and characteristics of homicide. In particular, certain sections of the population – African Americans and males – were disproportionately affected both as victims and offenders, though the gender balance evened out when only intimate partner
homicides were considered. Gender also had an effect on where homicides took place, with females most commonly killing or killed at home, while men killed other men in public areas, such as streets. Wolfgang’s (1958) study further demonstrated that victims and offenders were not necessarily mutually exclusive groups, since over a quarter of homicides were victim-precipitated, in that the eventual victim made the first violent move. The study, however, was limited by the availability of data, so it was not possible to examine issues such as the role of socio-economic class, ethnicity or the influence of alcohol (Collings, 1958). Luckenbill’s (1977) research examined the circumstances surrounding homicide, described as the ‘social occasion’ and the ‘dynamic interchange’. The ‘social occasion’ in which homicide occurred was invariably leisure-related and unconstrained by external limitations, as would be the case in work or at structured gatherings. Homicide occurred primarily in the home, at or near bars, or at other unsupervised public spaces, predominantly in the evenings and at weekends. These circumstances bear some similarity to the spatio-temporal convergence of offenders and targets described by Cohen and Felson’s (1979) routine activities theory. While routine activities theory is content with assuming the presence of a motivated offender, Luckenbill (1977) identified various stages of a ‘dynamic interchange’ common to homicide incidents. The interchange begins with the eventual victim doing or saying something that the offender takes offence to, followed by a failure by either participant to back down or apologise, resulting in a commitment to fight that ends with death. The two-sided, spontaneous and leisure-based scenario has been particularly homed in on in studies of confrontational male-on-male homicide (Polk, 1994; Brookman, 2005). While the applicability of ‘dynamic interchange’ theory to incidents involving young children or innocent injured parties (who did not seek to cause offence or contribute to starting a fight) may seem tenuous, Luckenbill (1977) surmounts this by positing that it is the offender’s interpretation of the victim’s behaviour, regardless of how accurate this is, that is relevant.

A key aspect of Luckenbill’s (1977) findings is the conceptualisation of victims as not necessarily passive or, in some cases, inadvertent participants in their own demise. Wolfgang (1967) carried out further work on the subject of victim precipitation, which revealed a number of differences between such incidents and the general pool of homicides studied. In particular, these cases featured a greater proportion of male victims of female offenders than in the overall study, that victims were more likely to have consumed alcohol and to have previous police or arrest records than other victims. Wolfgang’s (1967) observations have been reaffirmed by additional US research, which found that victims who had previous criminal histories were more likely than those without to have died in victim-precipitated homicides and, furthermore, to be demographically more similar to offenders than to other victims in terms of age, gender and race (Muftic and Hunt, 2013). A Dutch study examining the influence of event characteristics and victim behaviour found that certain factors, including victim precipitation, alcohol use by victims and the absence of moderating third parties was predictive of lethal incidents (Ganpat, van der Leun and Nieuwbeerta, 2013).

Despite the valuable contribution of Luckenbill’s (1977) work in understanding the build-up to homicide events, it does not go far enough in explaining why offenders (and victims, to a somewhat lesser extent) are more likely to be male. Polk (1994) suggested that confrontational violence between males is largely the result of the willingness of males to both challenge the honour of other men and to defend their own. Gilligan (2001: 67) contends that this willingness to pursue violence is motivated by shame – ‘overwhelming, and otherwise inescapable and ineradicable shame’. Violence is intrinsically linked to notions of masculinity; a man is afforded honour for his ability to use violence when challenged and experiences shame if perceived as passive or weak. As female honour is traditionally associated with passivity and chastity rather than violence, women are not as driven to mitigate their experiences of shame through acts of
violence (Gilligan, 2001). Jones (2008) also considered the influence of shame, arguing that males are less likely than women to have a secure sense of self and thus feel an imperative to prove their masculinity. He also suggested that there is an evolutionary connection between masculinity and violence, the legacy of an age when a man’s toughness determined his social position and access to resources and mates. The themes of shame and evolution were apparent in rationalisations for violence made by bar fighters seeking to normalise their activities (Copes, Hochstetler and Forsyth, 2013).

In accounting for why the majority of people do not resort to violence, Gilligan (2001) proposes that violence is only used to allay feelings of shame where internal feelings of self-esteem are insufficient to do so. Factors such as gender, poverty and discrimination due to race and age can increase the likelihood of being exposed to levels of disrespect that could overpower a person’s sense of self-worth. For example, having sufficient access to economic resources can provide a male with a stable basis on which to assert his masculinity, with violence being the resort of males whose masculinity is problematised by their lack of economic resources (Polk, 1994). Various studies have outlined the ways in which socio-economic marginalisation or upheaval can contribute to the development of subcultures based around the violent expression of masculinity (see Bourgois, 1996; Mears et al., 2013). While Gilligan’s theory of shame as the primary motivator for violence is informative, it does not adequately explain violence associated with filicide, which may be better understood as resulting from severe strain caused by social and economic isolation and depression, rather than from shame (Wilczynski, 1995; Alt and Wells, 2010). At the other end of the spectrum, shame would also appear to be an inappropriate explanation for some of the purposive, systemic violence associated with organised crime, which is focused on control and financial gain.

The concepts of anomie and strain have also proved influential in studies of homicide. Merton (1938) theorised that a cultural emphasis on the achievement of particular goals, combined with a failure to provide some people with the means or motivation to legitimately achieve these goals, creates a form of strain that can result in resorting to alternative, possibly illegitimate, methods of goal attainment. More recently, institutional anomie theory (Messner and Rosenfeld, 1997) asserts that the dominance of economic priorities at the bureaucratic level of a society facilitates higher crime rates by diminishing the relevance of non-economic bodies, such as the family or schools, which foster social control and attachments. Messner and Rosenfeld (1997) found that countries with lower homicide rates tended to have higher levels of social welfare supports. A longitudinal comparison of European nations over a period spanning the region’s phase of economic prosperity and subsequent decline found that welfare spending was linked to homicide rates (McCall and Brauer, 2014). Gilligan (2001) also identified high economic inequity and the stigmatisation of welfare services as triggers of shame which in turn led to the US experiencing higher homicide rates compared to other developed countries with lower inequality rates.

Moreover, levels of social capital, trust and political legitimacy can influence homicide rates independently of socio-economic measures such as deprivation and inequality. Rosenfeld, Messner and Baumer (2001) found that levels of social capital (measured through civic engagement and social trust) had a significant effect on homicide rates, even when taking into account other influential variables such as deprivation and population structure. Low levels of social cohesion and higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage were also found to be associated with a higher likelihood of homicide victimisation when tested at a neighbourhood level in the Netherlands (Nieuwbeerta et al., 2008). In a cross-national study, Nivette and Eisner (2013) found that the effects of political legitimacy on homicide were approximately as strong as the effects of factors such as economic inequality, and they concluded that levels of legitimacy could impact upon social control mechanisms, the distribution of social resources and the ability or
willingness of people to trust in the police to resolve conflict. Looking specifically at organised crime, van Dijk (2007) argues that the quality of rule of law, particularly the police and courts system, plays a significant role in determining the prevalence of organised crime in that state.

There is a further body of theoretical work that moves away from the theoretical explanations of homicide described so far, arguing that they are insufficient for explaining the observed trends. A comparison of European homicide rates from 1960 to 2010 against commonly used predictors of homicide, such as unemployment, GDP and population age structure, did not reveal any match in trends (Aebi and Linde, 2014). Eisner (2008) argues that the various theories and perspectives outlined earlier in this chapter fail to adequately account for upward trends in homicide in the latter half of the twentieth century, as they do not take into account the longer-term historical trends or the broad similarities across Western countries for various categories of violence. Eisner (2003, 2008) attributed the significant decline in homicide observed across Europe from the fifteenth century to the mid-twentieth century to the reduction in homicides committed by elite males and in male-on-male homicide which occurred in public spaces. He emphasised the increased centralisation of power to the State as increasing levels of self-control and social control by providing an alternate method of conflict resolution. The continued decline in homicide which occurred alongside rapid developments in technology, industrialisation and urbanisation that accompanied the shift into modernity casts doubt on theories which identify these factors as causes of violence (Eisner, 2008). Instead, Eisner (2008) proposes that culturally established expectations for acceptable conduct of life are more influential, with self-control, domesticity and respectability becoming increasingly important between 1850 and 1950. While Eisner (2003, 2008) argued that homicide rates have largely been governed by changing patterns of violence involving young males, Aebi and Linde (2014) found that changing homicide patterns tended to affect both genders and various age groups proportionately. Aebi and Linde (2014) identify the 1960s as heralding a massive shift in lifestyles and attitudes, one product of which was both males and females spending more time in public spaces and thus increasing their risk of victimisation.

Irish homicide trends

The rate of homicide in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland has been calculated by Eurostat at 1.3 and 1.42 per 100,000 respectively for the three-year period from 2008 to 2010 (Clarke, 2013). At first glance, these rates appear low when compared against the global homicide rate of 6.2 per 100,000, though it must be borne in mind that this figure includes nations experiencing high levels of political and social instability (UNODC, 2014). Homicide rates across Europe average at 3.0 per 100,000 (UNODC, 2014) but vary considerably, from as low as 0.31 per 100,000 in Iceland to as high as 7.7 per 100,000 in Lithuania (Clarke, 2013). The rates recorded in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are somewhat higher than many of our nearest geographic neighbours, with the exception of Belgium and Scotland, where homicide rates exceeded 1.7 per 100,000 (Clarke, 2013).

Republic of Ireland

What is immediately striking about recorded homicide figures in the Republic of Ireland is the relatively high rate between 1927 and 1937 compared with the subsequent three decades (see Figure 2.1). This was in part driven by high recordings of manslaughter, reflecting the fact that, prior to the introduction of a specific offence of dangerous driving causing death in 1962, such incidents were recorded as manslaughter (Brewer, Lockhart and Rodgers, 1997). From 1947 onwards, it is possible to distinguish the manslaughters recorded as a result of traffic fatalities from

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others, the effect of which is visible on the chart. However, a sharp and sustained reduction in recorded homicide occurred in 1938, almost a decade earlier. O’Donnell (2005) suggested that the War of Independence and Civil War may have contributed to higher numbers of homicides in the years immediately afterwards, followed by a drop in homicide which coincided with the commencement of the Second World War.

The decline in homicide rates observed until the mid-twentieth century and subsequent rise is broadly consistent with the wider European trend described by Eisner (2003, 2008). O’Donnell (2005) adds to Eisner’s (2008) thesis by suggesting that there were circumstances specific to the Republic of Ireland which influenced the development of a particular code of life that was unique to this country. In particular, he identifies the effect of the famine on demographics, the increase in social control exerted by the Roman Catholic Church, the respect afforded to celibacy and late marriage and, separately, a growing respect for infant life which accompanied industrialisation and increased prosperity. While Eisner (2003, 2008) argues that European homicide trends declined as a result of a reduction in violent behaviour by elite males, O’Donnell (2005) suggests that the decrease in the Republic of Ireland was driven by a reduction in infanticides perpetrated by poor women. Infanticide was a considerable problem in the nineteenth century, but has declined significantly (Kilcommins et al., 2004). In the ten years between 1927 and 1936, 92 murders were recorded where the victims were under one year old, reducing to 93 in the subsequent 30 years. There were further rapid drops in the following decades, with 28 cases recorded between 1967 and 1996, and just one case between 1997 and 2014. Unlike the broader homicide trend, 90 per cent of offenders in such incidents between 1927 and 1946 were female (O’Donnell, Sullivan and Healy, 2005). O’Donnell (2005) notes that the decline of infanticide began prior to the decline in the stigma against unmarried mothers and also preceded legislative changes such as the Adoption Act 1953 and the Social Welfare Act 1973, which introduced social welfare payments for unmarried mothers. While the numbers of
homicides recorded each year in the Republic of Ireland are too low to show the trend, infanticide and neonaticide remain internationally the most common forms of child killing: largely attributable to post-natal mental health disorders in the west, and a preference for male children in some cultures (O’Hagan, 2014).

While other jurisdictions experienced steady increases from the mid-sixties to early nineties, the trend in the Republic of Ireland was more staggered, with the early seventies and early nineties identified as key watersheds (O’Donnell, 2002; Kilcommins et al., 2004). According to Young, O’Donnell and Clare (2001), even excluding the deaths from the Dublin and Monaghan bombings in 1974, the early 1970s heralded an increase in the yearly number of homicides that never returned to previous levels. The average rate of homicide was low compared to other European countries, yet between 1950 and 1998 the rate of homicide per 100,000 of population increased by approximately 600 per cent, from slightly over 0.2 to just under 1.4 (Dooley, 1995; Young et al., 2001). Eisner (2008) attributed the Europe-wide upswing in homicide rates to changes in modes of living, which included increased alcohol consumption and leisure time, and decreased social control mechanisms in social locations. Indeed, the Republic of Ireland recorded the highest per capita rise in alcohol consumption in Europe between 1989 and 1999 (O’Donnell, 2002). O’Donnell (2002) also proposed that the rise in homicide in the Republic of Ireland corresponded to the increase in marginalisation and anomie that accompanied unequally distributed economic prosperity of the Celtic Tiger. Homicide rates in the Republic of Ireland peaked between 2005 and 2007 and have since declined, though there are substantial year-on-year variations. The downturn in homicide rates appears to have commenced somewhat later than in other European countries, with England and Wales, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Hungary and Finland all recording declining rates shortly after the beginning of the millennium (UNODC, 2014; ONS, 2014). The relationship between the recent economic decline and homicide rates in Ireland has not yet been fully explored.

**Northern Ireland**

Overall homicide trends in Northern Ireland (see Figure 2.2), available from 1968 onwards, are considerably different to those of the Republic of Ireland and indeed the rest of Europe, with peak rates being experienced in the 1970s. Recorded incidents of homicide declined in the late seventies and early 1980s before increasing slightly into the mid 1990s. Since then, the average rate has continued to gradually decline.

It is impossible to discuss homicide in Northern Ireland without considering the impact of socio-political violence during the Conflict. In excess of 3,000 people have been killed in Northern Ireland since 1969 as a result of political violence (Brewer et al., 1997; Brookman, 2005; PSNI, 2013; Fay, Morrissey and Smyth, 1999), which led Belfast to have the highest homicide rate in the EU (Kilcommins et al., 2004). The peaks and troughs in homicide rates in Northern Ireland are closely linked to the political and social dynamics of the jurisdiction. Fay et al. (1999) explain that the introduction of internment in August 1971 was a significant trigger, with a sudden increase in homicides from this time, which continued into 1972 with a peak of 376 incidents recorded, many of which were multiple deaths resulting from bombings (Brewer et al., 1997). The ceasefires announced by Republican and Loyalist groups in 1994 led to a significant reduction in homicides in the following year, with deaths linked to the security situation dropping from 54 in 1994/95 to 12 in the following year (PSNI, 2014a). It has been estimated that 357 people, 194 of whom were not paramilitaries, were killed by members of the security forces (police and army) between 1969 and 1993 (Mulcahy, 2006). Deaths resulting from the activities of members of the security forces were not typically considered to be homicides,
a reminder of Brookman’s (2005) assertion that homicide is a socially constructed concept. The number of deaths in Northern Ireland due to political unrest exceeded the number of recorded homicides between 1972 and 1976 (see Figure 2.3). The two lines follow remarkably similar trends throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with the number of security situation deaths recorded each year in the single figures since 2004.

With homicides related to political violence dominating both statistics and discussion, it can be difficult to extract an image of non-political homicide trends in Northern Ireland. Brewer et al.
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(1997) state that there was an average of 13 murders per year since 1969 which were not related to the Conflict, though this can be difficult to state definitely, as sectarian murders are not differentiated from others in official figures. Comparison of PSNI (2014a) figures from 2004/05 to 2012/13 for deaths related to the security situation to the list of deaths compiled by CAIN (Melaugh, 2015) indicates that such incidents are likely to be recorded as homicides (for example, none of the deaths appear to be perpetrated by members of the security services). On this basis, it is possible to estimate that there was an average of 24 homicides per year in Northern Ireland between 2004/05 and 2012/13 which were not related to the security situation, with a high of 37 in 2004/05, a low of 18 in 2012/13 and substantial variation in between. However, there is also the possibility that the prevalence of political violence had a knock-on effect on levels of general violence.

Noting an increase in domestic as well as political homicides since the commencement of civil unrest, Lyons and Harbinson (1986: 196) speculate that this was influenced by ‘the availability of weapons and the general atmosphere of violence’. The proliferation of weapons, particularly firearms, appears to have a significant effect on the rate of domestic homicide during the Conflict, with McWilliams (1997) noting that many victims of firearm-related domestic homicides were the wives of members of the security services. The chronicle of deaths maintained by CAIN includes a number of further incidents which may, peripherally or otherwise, be linked to paramilitary groups or their members (Melaugh, 2015). Nivette and Eisner (2013) have proposed that countries with low levels of political legitimacy, leading to, inter alia, reduced trust in the police and inequitable allocation of resources, experience higher homicide rates. The effect of disputed political legitimacy on non-political violence, such as domestic incidents, is exemplified in Northern Ireland. McWilliams (1997) explains that it could be difficult for victims who were married to members of the security forces to get an adequate response from their husbands’ colleagues, while women in Republican areas could face the additional problem of being dubbed an informer by their own community. Alternate law enforcement services provided by paramilitaries do not appear to have been any more effective than the legitimate system, with McWilliams (1997: 87) explaining that ‘women felt that the various police forces, both official and unofficial, would only condemn or punish the offender for his violent behaviour in the home if he was well known to them for his anti-social or offensive behaviour outside the home’.

Distribution of homicide

While the various studies of homicide discussed above may not have agreed on the causes or explanations of violence, there appears to be a general consensus that homicide is not evenly distributed. Certain subsections of the population tend to feature more prominently than others: in particular, young people, males and those who live in socio-economically deprived urban areas (World Health Organisation, 2010). While a lack of detailed and consistent information in relation to both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland has hampered analysis and interpretation of trends, it is possible to begin to develop a picture of Irish homicide and compare it to international trends and research.6

Geographic distribution

A breakdown of homicide figures by police administrative areas indicates that certain areas experience higher levels than others. In Northern Ireland (see Table 2.1), the PSNI districts covering Belfast city recorded almost a quarter of all homicides in the 11 years between 2003/04 and 2013/14, though the low number of homicides recorded each year means there can be substantial year-on-year percentage variations (PSNI, 2014b). As the PSNI data did not drill down to
the area level, it has not been possible to establish whether or not homicide is clustered primarily in urban or rural areas outside of Belfast. There appears to have been a shift in the distribution of homicide from Belfast to other districts; previous research has indicated that Belfast, particularly the North and West of the city, typically experienced about 50 per cent of murders in Northern Ireland between 1945 and 1995, though this could reduce if rural paramilitaries were particularly active (Brewer et al., 1997; Fay et al., 1999).

In the Republic of Ireland (see Table 2.2), homicide primarily affects Garda divisions which include large urban areas or commuter belts, such as Dublin, Limerick, Cork and Louth (CSO, 2014b; Kilcommins et al., 2004; Dooley, 1995, 2001). Dublin is disproportionately affected by homicide; 44 per cent of homicides between 2003 and 2013 were recorded in this region, whereas the 2011 Census indicated that 28 per cent of the population lives in the Dublin city and county (CSO, 2012). The imbalance is continued within the confines of the Dublin region, with the DMR Eastern division recording just 10 incidents out of 285 in the 11-year period, compared with 89 in the DMR Western division, 60 in the DMR Northern, and 49, 42 and 35 in the South Central, North Central and Southern divisions respectively (CSO, 2014b).

The Pobal HP Deprivation Index, which was constructed using data relating to demographic profiles, social class composition and labour market situation from the 2011 Census, indicates that the electoral districts contained within the boundaries of the DMR Eastern division are predominantly classed as affluent (Haase and Pratschke, 2012). In contrast, large pockets of the Northern, Western and Southern divisions are considered to be either disadvantaged or very disadvantaged. While many of the electoral wards of the North Central and South Central divisions are not classed as disadvantaged, these areas constitute the social and leisure hubs of the city centre. However, the Pobal HP Deprivation Index also identified pockets of disadvantage in rural areas, particularly in the north-west of the country, where there is not a high rate of homicide.
There are also inconsistencies in the relationship between homicide rates and deprivation in Northern Ireland. While both Belfast police districts have recorded similar proportions of homicides, the A district, covering the North and West of the city, has considerably higher levels of deprivation (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2010). Research examining the links between violence and deprivation in Northern Ireland during the Conflict (Fay et al., 1999) reached the conclusion that the relationship was by no means simple. While there appears to be some relationship between the rate of homicide in an area and levels of deprivation and disadvantage, the lack of consistency would suggest that there are other contributing factors. For example, lower levels of social cohesion, along with disadvantage, have been associated with higher homicide rates (Nieuwbeerta et al., 2008). Similarly, levels of social capital can influence homicide rates, even when controlling for factors such as deprivation (Rosenfeld et al., 2001). Considering the link between urban areas and homicide, the UNODC (2014) suggests that some of the risk factors associated with cities, such as greater economic inequality and the presence of gangs or organised crime groups, may be partially counteracted by protective factors, such as a greater policing presence, wider educational opportunities and closer medical facilities.

**Gender distribution**

Homicide in the island of Ireland is primarily a male-perpetrated offence. For incidents in the Republic of Ireland recorded between 2003 and 2013 (see Figure 2.4), 91.8 per cent of offenders (where known) were male, a ratio which is broadly consistent with earlier data (O’Donnell, 2005; Dooley, 1995, 2001). Over a nine-year period in Northern Ireland, 94 per cent of those convicted of homicide were male (Appleby et al., 2011), though it must be borne in mind that women may be less likely than men to be convicted (Dooley, 1995). In addition, many homicide offenders are young: the median age of those convicted in Northern Ireland between 2000 and 2008 was 27 (Appleby et al., 2011), while in the Republic of Ireland 54.4 per cent of homicide offenders were aged under 30. Males are also more likely to be the victims of homicide, with the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland recording similar proportions, at 79.6 per cent
and 78.2 per cent respectively (see Figures 2.5 and 2.6). In the Republic of Ireland, the risk of victimisation for males peaks between the ages of 21 and 30 and declines thereafter, though the ratios between age groups are somewhat narrower than for offenders.

The disproportionate representation of males as both victims and offenders is not unique to Ireland and has been routinely confirmed in research (Wolfgang, 1958; Brookman, 2005). Internationally, young males are most at risk of victimisation; however, in Europe, Asia and Oceania, males aged 30 to 59 are more at risk than younger males, which has been attributed to the focus on interpersonal violence in these regions (UNODC, 2014). Areas in which there is a greater incidence of socio-political or organised-crime-related violence, such as certain countries in the Americas, tend to have more male victims aged 15 to 29; this bears some similarity to
the experience in Northern Ireland, in which 91.8 per cent of victims were male, half of which were aged in their twenties or thirties (UNODC, 2014; Fay et al., 1999).

While Luckenbill's (1977) conceptualisation of homicide is as a situated transaction aimed to describe all non-felony-related homicides, the focus on leisure-based social occasions and the preservation of honour provide a useful springboard for a specific discussion on male-on-male homicide. To a certain degree, the focus on leisure highlights the role of alcohol consumption. The frequent association of alcohol with homicide is well chronicled internationally, with various studies noting its prevalence in approximately 50 per cent of cases (Wolfgang, 1958; O'Donnell, 2002; Brookman, 2005; Miles, 2012; UNODC, 2014). While alcohol consumption is by no means solely the preserve of male-on-male confrontational homicide, Dooley (1995, 2001) noted that a significant proportion of male-on-male homicides in the Republic of Ireland between 1972 and 1996 took place at night and involved the intoxication of at least one participant, and in 32.3 per cent of all homicides both the victim and offender were intoxicated. Research in Northern Ireland has found that 49 per cent of those convicted for homicide offences had a history of alcohol misuse, a higher percentage than was recorded in either Scotland or England and Wales (Appleby et al., 2011). An all-Ireland Drug Prevalence Survey has found that half of the surveyed population could be classed as engaging in harmful drinking practices, with greater proportions of males and those aged between 18 and 24 affected (National Advisory Committee on Drugs [NACD], 2012). More specifically, 57 per cent of males and a third of females were found to engage in risky single occasion drinking – better known as binge-drinking – at least once per month, as did 45 per cent of those aged 18 to 24 (NACD, 2012). Research has found evidence of a history of binge-drinking in convicted male homicide offenders (Miles, 2012), while, at a macro-level, national cultures of risky drinking practices have been associated with higher homicide rates (Bye, 2008).

Though the Drug Prevalence Survey cited above indicates that approximately a third of females participate in risky drinking behaviours, they comprise a much smaller proportion of homicide offenders and victims. This would indicate that alcohol is not the only factor driving Irish homicide rates. Research on convicted homicide offenders in England and Wales has suggested that intoxication interacts with other factors, such as immediate situational factors and longer-term experiences of deprivation and violence (Miles, 2012). This brings us to the 'honour' component of Luckenbill's theory, the preservation of which Gilligan (2001) contends is driven by the effects of shame on masculinity. Hourigan's (2011) exploration of community violence in disadvantaged social housing estates in Limerick explains how young men who were alienated from mainstream sources of status, such as employment, sought to affirm their masculinity by being associated with the much-feared local criminal groups (see Chapter 7). McWilliams (1997) highlights the significance of masculine pride, in explaining that some young males subjected to paramilitary punishments in Northern Ireland would have preferred to receive a physical punishment, such as knee-capping, rather than be humiliated in front of the community. Physical injury and a war wound, it seems, are preferable to a dent in one's mental construction of masculinity.

As is the case internationally, females feature in Irish homicide statistics as victims more than as offenders. Females comprise slightly over 8 per cent of homicide offenders in the Republic of Ireland, and were victims in 19.8 and 21.5 per cent of cases in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland respectively (see Figures 2.4–2.6). The proportion of female victims in the Republic of Ireland has decreased; between 1972 and 1996, approximately 28 per cent of victims were female (Dooley, 1995, 2001). The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland differ from European averages regarding the percentage of female victims, with the UNODC (2014) reporting that 28 per cent of homicide victims in the region were female. Countries with low
homicide rates (below 1.0 per 100,000) have still greater proportions of female victims, including New Zealand (40 per cent) and Japan, where female victims outnumber males (UNODC, 2014). In contrast, the percentage of female victims is lower in the Americas (12 per cent); this is not to say that intimate partner or domestic homicide is any less prevalent in the Americas, but rather that other categories of homicide, such as organised crime, drives the male victimisation rate upwards (UNODC, 2014). It is possible that the higher rates of organised crime and political violence in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland contribute to a lower percentage of female victims.

Female offenders in the Republic of Ireland have tended to be older than their male counterparts, with numbers peaking in the 31–40 age range. The ages of female victims are more evenly distributed across the various age ranges than any other group. The age profile of female victims in the Republic of Ireland appears broadly similar to that of other jurisdictions (UNODC, 2014). The differing age profiles of males and females may be explained by reference to the types of homicides that women tend to be involved in. Homicides involving women, either as a perpetrator or a victim, are more likely to be domestically situated and involve intimate partners (Brookman, 2005; Schwartz, 2010; UNODC, 2014). While the CSO and PSNI data do not provide motives for homicides, advocacy groups claim that 62 per cent of women killed in the Republic of Ireland between 1996 and 2013 died in their homes, with over half killed by a current or former partner, while approximately a third of homicides recorded in Northern Ireland in 2011/12 had a domestic motivation (Women’s Aid, 2014; Women’s Aid NI, 2014). An earlier Northern Ireland study suggested that men and women had an almost equal risk of experiencing non-political homicide, though it should be borne in mind that the study was confined to cases where the offender had been referred for psychiatric assessment (Lyons and Harbinson, 1986). Previous research on homicide in the Republic of Ireland between 1972 and 1996 found that when women did kill they were significantly more likely to kill an intimate partner than males were (Dooley, 1995, 2001). A study of middle- to high-income nations has conservatively estimated intimate partner homicides to account for one in seven incidents: 6.3 per cent of male homicides, rising to 38.6 per cent of female homicides – a pronounced difference between genders (Stockl et al., 2013). Canadian research has found that intimate partner homicide is significantly different to other types of homicide, with an increased likelihood of female victims, older offenders and evidence of planning or revenge (Juodis et al., 2014). Stamatel (2014) also noted that both victims and offenders in intimate partner homicide tended to be older. Domestic violence experienced by the female is a common precursor to intimate partner homicides, regardless of whether the offender in the homicide is male or female (Wykes, 1995; Walklate, 1995; Juodis et al., 2014).

Female perpetrators are known to feature as offenders in incidents of filicide more so than in other cases, though males are more likely to be the perpetrators in familicide cases, where the entire family is killed (Brookman, 2005; Alt and Wells, 2010; Schwartz, 2010; O’Hagan, 2014). Tallant (2011) outlines a number of Irish cases of filicide and familicide which have occurred in recent years; as in other jurisdictions, there have been incidents where children have been killed by their mothers as well as by male parents. Internationally, the killing of children by strangers is considered to be a rare event; the perpetrators of such crimes are usually close relatives, such as parents or step-parents (Brookman, 2005; Alt and Wells, 2010; ONS, 2014).

Various motivations have been proposed to explain why or how a parent could resort to killing their child, many of which can be linked to mental or emotional difficulties, or socio-economic strain. In the cases described by Tallant (2011) there are several incidents in which young single mothers who were dependent on social welfare and experiencing some level of social isolation took their own lives and that of their child. In further cases, perpetrated by both genders, it is
believed that the motivation was a perceived fear of not being able to protect or support their families into the future. Wilczynski (1995:172–3) outlines circumstances common in filicide cases:

\[P\]ut simply, misery, isolation and instability are strongly correlated with filicide. Numerous social stresses are a very prominent feature of filicidal parents’ histories, such as financial or housing problems, youthful parenthood, marital conflict, lack of preparation for parenthood and children who are difficult to care for.

Alt and Wells (2010) describe offenders as frequently being young adults experiencing stresses related to finances and a lack of work, alcohol or drugs.

Filicide that occurs in the context of parental separation tends to be different to those driven by socio-economic strain (Tallant, 2011; O’Hagan, 2014). There are also some notable overlaps with trends in intimate partner homicide, with offenders in both scenarios tending to be older than the ‘typical’ homicide offender (O’Hagan, 2014; Juodis et al., 2014; Stamatel, 2014). Despite the incidents seeming to occur suddenly, O’Hagan (2014) suggests that such incidents are in fact premeditated and well planned around custodial arrangements, and often motivated by a desire to exact revenge upon the former partner (see also Juodis et al. [2014] on intimate partner homicides).

Organised crime

It has been suggested that the arrival of the drugs trade (particularly heroin) in the Republic of Ireland has had a greater impact than terrorism on the type of serious crime experienced in the country, with professional homicides (excluding paramilitary violence) and the use of firearms in revenge attacks or minor disputes rare phenomena before the late 1970s (Brewer et al., 1997; O’Mahony, 2008). Referring to Goldstein et al.’s (1992) study of homicide in New York, O’Mahony (2008) notes that a greater proportion of homicides are the result of systemic violence employed by organised crime groups to further their business objectives, rather than violence triggered by the psychosomatic effects of drug-taking or economic compulsion to support a habit. Organised crime homicides differ from other male-on-male homicides in that they are more likely to be planned, purposive events, with common motivations centring on the control of both people and illegal markets and the need to uphold respect for group leaders (Hopkins, Tilley and Gibson, 2013; UNODC, 2014; see also Hourigan, infra).

While neither the CSO nor PSNI label incidents as being linked to organised crime or otherwise, various books and newspaper articles have made reference to the numbers of homicides linked to organised crime or dissident activity in the Republic of Ireland in recent years. O’Mahony (2008) estimated that over 100 homicides were linked to gangland activity in the preceding decade. More recently, six murders were linked to organised crime or dissident activity in 2011, increasing to 16 in 2012, and reducing to nine the following year (Brady, 2012, 2013, 2014). These figures indicate that organised crime groups have been linked to approximately 19 per cent of homicides in the three-year period. In contrast, 1 per cent of homicides in Europe as a whole and 30 per cent in the Americas are linked to organised crime (UNODC, 2014). Brookman (2005) estimated that gang-related homicides involving firearms and relating to the drugs trade have accounted for approximately 1 percent of murders in England and Wales, while just 2.4 per cent of homicides recorded in 2005/06 were linked to organised crime (Hopkins et al., 2013). The rates observed in the Republic of Ireland are more similar to those of Italy, where between 10 and 15 per cent of homicides have been linked to Mafia activity (UNODC, 2014).
Organised crime appears to be linked to the development of a ‘gun culture’ in the Republic of Ireland that exceeds the direct activities of organised crime groups, through the importation of firearms alongside drug consignments and in providing access to firearms to group members and associates (O’Mahony, 2008). In 2006, for example, there were at least three homicides committed with firearms which, while not directly linked to organised crime, could be traced back to people connected with such groups (O’Mahony, 2008). A similar situation was observed in Northern Ireland during the Conflict; while firearms were predominantly used in homicides related to the security situation, the increased availability of such weapons led to them also being used in incidents that were not politically motivated (McWilliams, 1997; Lyons and Harbinson, 1986).

The recent fluctuations in organised-crime-related homicides bear similarities to variations in the number of homicides involving firearms. The significant increase in organised-crime-related homicides in 2012 was accompanied by the number of homicides committed using firearms increasing from 14 in 2011 to 21 in 2012 (CSO, 2014e). The decrease in firearm-perpetrated homicides in 2013 was similar to the decrease in the number of organised-crime-linked murders. Firearms are a relatively common feature of homicides in the Republic of Ireland, despite a restrictive gun ownership policy. A steady increase has been recorded in the percentage of homicides involving firearms since the 1970s, rising from 18.9 per cent between 1972 and 1991 to 27.2 per cent between 1992 and 1996, and further increasing to 33.4 per cent between 2003 and 2013 (Dooley, 1995, 2001; CSO, 2014e). An increase in injuries relating to handgun shootings has also been reported in Dublin hospitals (Murphy et al., 2014). While the PSNI data did not provide information on the use of firearms, the prevalence of firearms in homicides related to conflict since 2002 is evident (Melaugh, 2015). The pervasiveness of such weapons is much lower in England and Wales, featuring in approximately 6 per cent of homicides per year (Brookman, 2005; ONS, 2014). Across Europe, firearms are used in 13 per cent of homicides (UNODC, 2014). O’Mahony (2008: 62) notes that it is an ‘unwelcome distinction’ that the Republic of Ireland is more akin to the US than the UK in terms of firearm-related homicides. Approximately 69 per cent of murders recorded in 2012 in the US involved firearms (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2012), perhaps unsurprising given that firearms are widely legal to own. Krug, Powell and Dahlberg’s (1998) study found that the US recorded significantly higher rates of firearm homicides than economically similar countries in Europe, Asia and Oceania. Within the US, research has found higher levels of firearm ownership to be correlated with higher levels of firearm homicide in particular areas (Blumstein and Rosenfeld, 2008).

In discussing the place of violence within organised crime groups, Dorn, Levi and King (2005) describe it as both necessary and dangerous. The preservation of masculinity and honour is as important to the group as it is to the individual; a successful organised crime group must be able to maintain its reputation and command respect in the face of competition from other groups. While a capacity for violence is important, actually resorting to violence can be regarded as problematic for group leaders, in that it attracts unwanted attention from the police and could deter potential business partners and customers (Dorn et al., 2005). Organised crime groups in the Republic of Ireland are not afraid of resorting to violence and intimidation, which has at times escalated into series of tit-for-tat killings between rival groups (O’Mahony, 2008: 61). Among the more infamous feuds are the Crumlin/Drimnagh feud, linked to up to 24 deaths, most of which occurred between 2001 and 2009 (Sunday Independent, 2013), and the Limerick feuds (McCullagh, 2011). O’Mahony suggests that members of organised groups may enjoy the notoriety garnered from the media attention associated with their crimes and feel a need to live up to their reputations. This appears inconsistent with research in the UK, in which external attention is regarded as being bad for business (Dorn, Oette and White, 1998; Hopkins et al., 2013).
A perhaps unique aspect to the landscape of organised crime in both Northern Ireland and the Republic is the friction between criminal groups and paramilitary organisations. The role of paramilitary groups in providing an alternate system of criminal justice in Northern Ireland was established during the Conflict, with such groups targeting perpetrators of a range of crimes, from petty to more serious offences, with punishments ranging from warnings to beatings and death (Knox, 2000; Conway, 1997). Both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups have been linked to the murders – often involving firearms – of drug dealers in Belfast since 1994 (Brewer et al., 1997; Melaugh, 2015). Informal criminal justice systems flourished for several reasons, relating to the lack of legitimacy of and distrust towards the RUC in Republican areas; fears concerning rising levels of minor crime; and the perception that the formal justice system was too slow and too soft on crime (Knox, 2000). The relationship between paramilitary and organised crime groups also exists in the Republic of Ireland, though it is somewhat convoluted. Paramilitary groups have been linked to campaigns targeting local drug dealers, but there have also been allegations made that such groups are participating in organised criminality by taxing dealers or by arranging safe passage for products (Brewer et al., 1997). There have been several alleged revenge homicides both within paramilitary groups and involving organised crime groups based in the Republic of Ireland since 2012 (Williams, 2012; O’Keeffe, 2012; Melaugh, 2015).

While there is a lack of detailed research, it is possible that the comparatively high level of organised crime homicide in the Republic of Ireland results from a combination of factors, including a relatively small and thus highly competitive potential market, the cycle of revenge attacks in various feuds and an apparently ready supply of firearms coupled perhaps with an increasingly pervasive gun culture in some sections of the population. While paramilitary and organised crime groups have been shown to clash, there is the possibility that the legacy of socio-political violence has contributed to an environment in which organised crime can flourish.

**Conclusion**

In many regards the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland reflect the trends and characteristics that define homicide in other Western or developed countries, particularly in relation to interpersonal violence. Despite the data limitations there are indications of similar experiences of intimate partner or family homicide, and male-on-male confrontational violence. The over-representation of males, particularly those who are young, is as much a feature of Irish homicide as it is globally. However, as O’Donnell (2005) noted, there are events and circumstances specific to each country which have the potential to uniquely shape that nation’s trends in violent crime. While theories relating to both the situational factors and the effects of social inequality appear to be beneficial in developing our understanding of Irish homicide, further research is required to explore the extent to which local factors – such as the economic boom and bust associated with the Celtic Tiger, the history of political violence and the rise of organised crime – are contributing to a specifically Irish picture of homicide.

**References**


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Homicide


Sarah Skedd


—— (2014b) ‘Number of crimes recorded in Northern Ireland for financial years 2003–04 to 2013–14 for the offences of homicide, attempted murder and threats to kill/conspiracy to murder by policing district’. Personal Communication, 8 July 2014.


Notes
1 The views expressed in this chapter are those of the author alone, based on publicly available data.
2 Data regarding homicide and related offences in the Republic of Ireland comes from a variety of sources. Since 2006 the Central Statistics Office has been responsible for the publication of official Garda crime statistics, on a quarterly and annual basis (CSO 2006). Before 2006 crime statistics were reported in the Annual Reports of An Garda Síochána. To smooth out some of the annual fluctuations in homicide figures and thus reveal a more general trend, a five-year rolling average line has been added to Figure 2.1. Figure 2.1 was compiled using data from the CSO (2014a) and O’Donnell, O’Sullivan and Healy (2005).
3 Data regarding homicide and related offences in Northern Ireland comes from a variety of sources. Recent data for Northern Ireland is reported by the Statistics Branch of the PSNI, with earlier data dating from 1968 onwards collected from the Chief Constable’s Annual Reports (PSNI 2013). To smooth out some of the annual fluctuations in homicide figures and thus reveal a more general trend, a five-year rolling average line has been added to Figure 2.2.
4 There are differing reports as to the number of victims of the Conflict, depending on the criteria applied for inclusion. The official figures (those currently reported by the PSNI) are quite narrowly defined and are limited to deaths occurring in Northern Ireland only. Other reports (such as Fay et al., 1999) adopted wider criteria, including not only deaths outside Northern Ireland but also deaths resulting from road traffic and other accidents connected to the security forces.
5 Figure 2.3 has been generated from PSNI (2012, 2013) figures. PSNI figures are limited to those which occurred in Northern Ireland and which are directly related to the Conflict.
6 There was differing information available from the CSO and PSNI regarding the breakdown of homicide figures into various demographic subsections. While the CSO provides combined figures regarding gender and age, the PSNI data deals with these attributes separately for victims and does not provide information relating to offenders at all. The CSO data is also somewhat more detailed than the PSNI data in terms of the age ranges elaborated upon and on the geographic levels for which figures are available. Analysis is constrained by the limitations of both data sets, but more so for Northern Ireland.