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Unsolved homicide cases in Switzerland. An update

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Project

- Database with all cases of intentional homicide committed in Switzerland between 1980 and 2014
- The current project updates the database of cases committed between 1980 and 2004 (includes some 1,500 cases of homicide)
- The first data collection (1980 to 2004) included 1'462 victims of (completed) homicide
- The new data base includes additional 432 files of victims of (completed) homicide, plus 64 cases for which we did not obtain permission to analyse the files.



The first study on unsolved homicides

Mathias Bänziger & M. Killias, Unsolved Homicides in Switzerland: Patterns and Explanations, *Eur. J. Crim.* 11/5 (2014), 619-634

In the multi-variate analysis, the odds of a cases to remain unsolved were significantly related to the following variables (ORs):

- being unmarried (2.3)
- the homicide occurred in a public place (3.7)
- the victim was homosexual (5.2)

Marginally significant ($p < .10$) were related to the odds of a case to remain unsolved:

- foreign nationality of the victim (2.2)
- victim had history of substance abuse (2.1)

As the analysis of unsolved files (case histories) revealed, many homosexual victims were killed in their own premises (70%, vs. 26% among heterosexual victims of unsolved cases). Homosexual victims of unsolved cases were also older (60% > 40) than heterosexual victims (35% > 40).

→ Many homosexual victims were killed by young male prostitutes, mostly in their premises.



The update: an outline

At first glance, unsolved cases have decreased (15 cases in 496, or 3%) after 2004, compared to the pre-2004 period (181 cases in 1462, or 12.3%).

Among the 15 cases of unsolved homicides, none concerns homosexual victims. In 9 cases, some link with organized crime (drugs, prostitution, human trafficking) seems likely. Other cases concern possibly private conflicts among immigrants (4 cases) or murder in connection with robbery.



Why did unsolved homicides decrease?

- In 2002, DNA became officially available for the Swiss police on a systematic and broad bases.
- After 2002, a national DNA database was established.
- This must have increased the likelihood of solution of murder cases with unknown victim-offender relationship.
- In particular, homicide in the premises of the victim may have become far easier to solve.
- Homicide with homosexual or bisexual victims remained relatively stable during the period 2005-2014 compared to 1980-2004 (decrease from 2.9% to 2.2%).
- However, the proportion of unsolved homicides decreased from 12.4% to 2.3%.
- Non of the victims of unsolved cases was homosexual or bisexual.



Conclusions

- The role of DNA seems to have reshaped considerably the odds of homicide cases to be solved.
- This seems to have affected mostly cases of murder where anonymous offenders killed victims after intense interaction (such as sexual intercourse), particularly in the act took place in the victim's premises.
- In the further analysis, we shall try to analyse to what extent cases were solved using DNA during the pre- and the post-2002 periods.

