



Pathology Biology Section - 2012

G65 Homicidal Deaths in the Republic of Ireland Through the Work of the Office of the State Pathologist

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain information on the prevalence and incidence of homicidal deaths in the Republic of Ireland, as seen through the workload of the Office of the State Pathologist.

The presentations will impact the forensic science community by presenting, possibly for the first time, internationally, the figures and characteristics of homicidal deaths reported in the Republic of Ireland for one complete decade (2001 to 2011). The office of the state pathologist is an administrative branch of the Department of Justice in Ireland and is responsible for the forensic pathology investigation of all these deaths. This presentation will attempt to provide an overview of the breakdown of the types of homicidal deaths and their respective demographical and forensically-pertinent features.

Homicide is defined literally the killing of the human being. Ireland, the Island of the saints and scholars is not totally immune to this regrettable human tendency. The archival system of the Office of the State Pathologist in the Republic of Ireland (covering the Island of Ireland except the six counties in the province of Ulster, known as Northern Ireland) has been searched between 2001 and 2011 for all reported and investigated homicidal deaths. The population of the Irish republic is just over 4.0 million inhabitants. This office is part of and works within the guidelines and rules set and approved by the Department of Justice and Law Reform.

This chosen period covers a socioeconomic time when the economic cycle and individual disposable income in the republic literally oscillated between one extreme of a boom position (known as the Celtic tiger era, 2000 to 2007) to literally the juxtaposed position of widespread bust period with significant recession (the bursting of property market bubble, 2008 to present).

Homicidal deaths account for 30% to 40% of the office's case workload. The rest of the cases dealt with are, also, regarded by the Garda Síochána (police force) as suspicious deaths. The office handles a wide variety of homicidal deaths. The data collected briefly reveal that fatalities due to firearm-related, sharp force trauma, and/or blunt force trauma each accounts for one third of the total figures.

Increasing number of firearm related - deaths, involving handguns, rifles, and shotguns have been identified during this period. The increase within this period is attributed to a noticeable rise and conspicuousness of the activity of multiple and rival criminal gangs engaged in illegal activities. Following the Good Friday Accord between the republic of Ireland and United Kingdom over the state and future of Northern Ireland, some dissident paramilitary groups have increased their involvement in different criminal activities, bringing them into either direct turf struggle with the established criminal gangs or enhanced co-operation in criminality. Despite the perception and to some extent the evidence pointing to the presence of large varieties of firearms in the country (mostly smuggled) there appears a noticeable absence, during this study period, of military-style assault rifle related injuries.

Blunt force trauma is still a major cause of concern, despite its relative ratio decline, compared to what it used to account for in the past. The data confirms the international findings that major urban population centres are relatively more violent than urban communities.

Stabbing and incisional wounds which are still encountered reasonably regularly are discussed in terms of their relative impact into the homicidal death scene.

The data presented also includes homicide by motor vehicle accidents (hit and run, dangerous driving leading to deaths) but not other types of road traffic accidents fatalities, as these are not handled by this office. Drugs, especially ethyl alcohol, constitute an important part in the Irish homicidal death scene, especially non-firearm related. Alcohol still is a major health concern in the overall mortality figures in Ireland in general.

Despite the recent concerns voiced nationally over the activities of paedophilic priests, and the traditionally high relative birth rate when compared to the rest of the European Union countries, it appears that the incidence of fatal child abuse and fatal non-accidental infant and child traumata are noticeably relatively very low.

Men were more likely to be victims of homicide or serious assault than women in Ireland, like the rest of the European Union. Like many other countries, women were more likely than men to be victims of intimate partner homicidal death and homicide-suicide deaths. The latter are encountered relatively infrequently occasionally.

At midpoint of this study period there were 58 victims of homicide in Ireland in 2005. Of these, 49 were men. Almost half of male victims were aged between 21 and 30 years of age. One third of female victims of homicide were aged between 21 and 30 years of age.

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