

Homicides in Latin America: a search for broad and comprehensive ways of tackling the issue

Homicide has been the subject of national and international studies as it represents a universal indicator of social violence. The diversified literature on this theme has highlighted its magnitude, both in socially and economically developed countries as well as in the so-called developing countries. The younger contingent of the population, particularly young males, has been the most victimized and is also clearly the group that most commits homicide. In this respect, Latin America stands out among other regions of the world, having shown growth trends in mortality from this cause in the 1980s and 1990s, where rates continue to remain high.

However, the majority of the studies on homicide in the world and the region has focused on national territories and used epidemiological approaches. There are few who formulate comparative analyses or seek to understand the possible similarities and differences between the areas, contextualizing the social, political and economic processes involved within the dynamics that foster the greater or lesser occurrence of these events.

This thematic issue represents an effort to conduct extensive and comparative analyses of the information on homicides in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela. Thus, it presents epidemiological studies on trends in mortality rates, the quality of information about deaths, the specific groups most affected, the means used to perpetrate the lethal aggression and factors that converge and lead to the excessive number of homicides. Moreover, an attempt is made to increase knowledge by adding a comprehensive line of explanation for the high or low rates of death by homicide in specific areas and groups, based on case studies and the gender approach.

Several articles included here are the result of the proposal of a group of researchers to conduct a multi-centric study that was consolidated and involved the Latin American Center for Studies on Violence and Health/CLAVES of Brazil and Argentina, the Investigation Group on Violence and Health of the National University of Colombia and the Study Center on Human Health, Population and Development of the University of Guadalajara, Mexico. Besides these, the publication includes other renowned authors from Venezuela and other Brazilian institutions, representatives of the Pan American Health Organization, the Brazilian Ministry of Health and members of the National Institute of Science and Technology/INCT Violence, Democracy and Civic Safety which is sponsored by the National Council of Scientific and Technological Development/CNPq.

This publication is unequivocal proof of the feasibility of organizing and analyzing data on homicides in different and distant countries of the region, even with limited resources and without the adequate financial support for the groups of Latin American countries included in the project. This was made possible by the intense communication, interaction and quest for knowledge among all the participants.

It is hoped that you, the reader, can incorporate the dense reflections of this work and draw inspiration for your activities as a health professional and as a citizen. The fact is that death by homicide reveals far more about social training and organization – such as inequality, exclusion, informality, corruption, impunity – than merely a problem of public security.

Edinilsa Ramos de Souza

Guest Editor