

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A Comparative Analysis of Homicide Situations in three Districts of North Gondar Administrative Zone, Ethiopia

Ayenew Hailu¹, Abeje Berhanu²

Abstract

Homicide is one of the most serious violent crimes leading to the death of a person with intentional or unintentional acts. It involves three main elements: the offender, the victim, and the offense itself. Each homicide is, therefore, unique depending on the diverse combinations of these three elements. Using the routine activities approach (RRA) as a framework and taking homicide situations as a unit of analysis, the current study aims to present a comparative analysis of homicide situations in three districts of northwest Ethiopia. To achieve the objective, the study employed a retrospective analysis of 106 homicide situations available in police crime records over a five-year period (2009/10–2013/14). Supplementary data was also obtained from cross-sectional survey of 66 homicide convicts. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS v.23. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used. Qualitative data of cases constructed from police crime records were presented to substantiate quantitative findings. Analyses indicated that differences exist among districts in terms of the patterns of homicide situations (spatio-temporal characteristics, victim-offender relationship, weapons used, and motives behind homicide). The finding also showed that a significant proportion of victims (91.6%) and offenders were men, and the age group between 25–29 was one of the most vulnerable groups to homicide victimization. Moreover, occupation of offenders was significantly associated with the district's homicide rate ($\chi^2=33.664$, $df=4$ Chi square critical ($df=4$) =9.49 ($\alpha=0.05$); 13.28 ($\alpha=0.01$)). It is essential for future research to identify underlying social-structural and cultural determinants that produce differences in homicide rates and patterns among the districts.

Keywords: routine activities, homicide situations, offender, victim

Introduction

Homicide is one of the most serious violent criminal offenses involving the death of an individual due to the actions of another individual (Corzine, 2011; Schmallegger, 2006). Beegly (2003) defines homicide as “the intentional and illegal killing of another human being” (p.1); and it usually involves the interaction of potential victims and offenders in time and space (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Luckenbill, 1977; Miethe & Regoeczi, 2004). The FDRE (2005) Criminal Code of Ethiopia (Proclamation No.414/2004) identifies three types

1 Addis Ababa University, Department of Sociology, College of Social Sciences, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Email: ayenewmaraki@gmail.com

2 Addis Ababa University, Department of Sociology, College of Social Sciences, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/erjssh.v12i1.6>

of homicide: aggravated homicide (homicide in the first degree), homicide in the second degree, and extenuated homicide. Aggravated homicide involves killing with exceptional premeditation and cruelty. Homicide in the second degree involves killing with malice aforethought and no respect for the law. The third is referred to as extenuated homicide which involves killing in resisting the violation of the privacy of one's house, or following gross provocation or emotion that is understandable and, in some degree, excusable by the circumstances.

Many lives are lost due to homicide. Nearly half a million—464,000 (UNODC, 2019) homicide cases were recorded worldwide in 2017. In this same year, the global average homicide victimization rate stands at 6.1 per 100,000 population. Accounting for an estimated 176,000 victims, Africa accounted for the largest number of intentional homicides worldwide in 2021 (UNODC, 2023).

Like many other African countries, Ethiopia has been experiencing high levels of homicide (UNODC, 2011; WHO, 2014). It has caused the death of several people and resulted in the detention of many others (CSA, 2012). According to the Central Statistical Agency (CSA) more than 4,600 homicide incidents were reported between 2001/02—2004/05 annually (CSA, 2003, 2004, 2005), and afterwards, between 2005/06-2007/08, the average fell well below 4,000 (CSA, 2006, 2009). However, data for 2007/2008 and afterwards were neither complete nor available. According to UNODC's (2011) report, Ethiopia had the fourth highest murder rate in the East African Region (25.5 per 100,000 population) with more than ten times (i.e., 20,239) the homicide cases indicated in the Central Statistical Agency's (CSA, 2011) incomplete report. The recent UNODC (2023) report did not include data for Ethiopia.

In 2008/09, 2,490 homicide cases were presented to the court of law in Amhara region in Ethiopia. The subsequent year (2009/10) 2,677 homicides were reported (CSA, 2011). There were 1,284 homicides reported in North Gondar zone over a five year period (2009/10—2013/14); and, on average, 257 homicides were reported each year (NGAZPD, 2014). But there was variation in the number of homicide cases among the constituent districts.

Official government reports tend to focus on the characteristics of the offender and give little attention to the victim and other circumstances related to the homicidal act (CSA, 2011; NGAZPD, 2014). It is, however, argued that offender-based studies are less fruitful to understand homicide comprehensively; and led to a shift in the unit of analysis from the offender to the homicide situation, defined as, "the convergence of offender, victim, and offense characteristics that define the situational context of homicide" (Miethe & Regoeczi, 2004, p. 1). In relation to this, researchers (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Luckenbill, 1977; Miethe & Regoeczi, 2004) recommend a focus on homicide situations that involve actors bounded by space and time. This shift in scope would give evidence why particular situations are more frequent than others while offering a holistic picture of the homicide transaction involving actors under defined contexts. The socio-demographics of the actors

involved, the victim-offender relationship, weapons employed, motive behind homicide, and time and space are essential elements of homicide worth considering (Schmallegger, 2006).

As it is indicated in various studies, men and young people were more vulnerable to homicide victimization as well as offending (UNODC, 2014, 2019, 2023). In UNODC's 2023 report, 79% of all homicide victims and 95% of the offenders globally were male. Furthermore, this same report indicates male aged between 15 and 29 years were at the highest risk of homicide victimization worldwide. With regard to the victim-offender relationship, the largest proportion of homicide occurs among close relatives or acquaintances or other family members (Cohen & Felson, 1979). In Bohannan's (1967) study, in more than a half (53.3%) of the homicide cases, victims were kinsmen of the offender. A study from the South Africa revealed that in high percentage (63%) of the homicide cases, victims and offenders were acquaintances (Matzopoulos et al., 2024). In East Gojjam, Sewnet (2012) reported that women were more than 11–12 times more likely to be killed by a man they knew than a stranger.

A long standing debate concerning violent death is the availability and role of guns. Some argue that the readily availability of firearms was associated with an increase in homicide rate (Duggan, 2001; Pavesi, 2016; Roth, 2002); and others found no strong relation between gun control/availability and homicide rate (Miron, 2001). Evidence from South Africa tends to attribute handguns for the persistence of high homicide (SAPS, 2023). In traditional societies, sharp instruments are mentioned as weapons to slay victims (Bohannan, 1967). In heated spontaneous interactions, offenders are likely to use materials at their hand to commit homicide. For instance, Mitiku (2017) found that homicide cases in Addis Ababa were predominantly committed by sharp instruments, stone and stick.

The main motives include adultery, land disputes, avenging the death of a close kin, and self-defense (Donovan, 2003; Idris, 1990; Oloo, Messele Negash, Teka Gebremariam, & Mezraete-Ab, 1968; Sewnet, 2012). Attention is also given to the influence of alcohol and drug intoxication on precipitating homicide. The use of alcohol and illicit drugs can increase both the risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence (Matzopoulos et al., 2024; Semahegn & Mengistie, 2015; UNODC, 2014, 2023). In Addis Ababa, documented circumstances associated with homicide included robbery, revenge, and alcoholism (Jibat, 2011; Mitiku, 2017).

In Ethiopia, a couple of legal, epidemiological, and criminological studies exist (Donovan, 2003; Getinet *et al.*, 2022; Idris, 1990; Mitiku, 2017; Sewnet, 2012). The current study attempts to contribute to an understanding of the problem by presenting a retrospective comparative analysis of homicide situations in three districts of North Gondar zone taking the routine activities approach (RAA) (Cohen & Felson, 1979, 1980) as a framework. According to RAA, a homicide (like other predatory crimes) involves a suitable target, a

motivated offender, and the absence of capable guardians that prevent the incident from happening. The routine activities approach assumes that criminal activities are intimately tied to and greatly influenced by the structure of daily activities people undertake. It is within contexts associated with routine activities that illegal acts are committed.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the current study is to make a comparative analysis of homicide situations in three districts of northwest Ethiopia (West-Armachiho, Dembiya, and Takussa districts).

Methods of the Study

Study Design, Data Sources, and Sampling

To address the objective of the study, two sources of data were used: Police Crime Records (PCR) and survey of homicide convicts. This study was primarily a retrospective descriptive analysis using a multistage cluster sample of homicide situations recorded in police files. There were 1,284 homicide cases reported between 2009/10 and 2013/14 fiscal years in the zone consisting of twenty-four districts. Nonetheless, homicide was not evenly distributed as some districts were more severely affected than the others. In the first stage, districts were purposively classified into three clusters according to their homicide rates (HR): high homicide districts ($HR > 9$) comprising 7 districts; medium homicide districts (HR, 5—9) comprising 10 districts; and low homicide districts ($HR < 5$) comprising 7 districts. In the second stage, one district was randomly selected from each cluster; and thus, West-Armachiho (HHD, $HR = 43$ per 100,000), Dembiya (MHD, $HR = 7$ per 100,000), and Takussa (LHD, $HR = 4$ per 100,000) districts were selected. In the third stage, homicide situations with complete information from each district police records were sorted out. Finally, out of 210 homicides cases, 106 (32 in West-Armachiho, 52 in Dembiya, and 22 in Takussa) containing relevant information were selected for study.

In many instances, police crime records lack information about the socio-demographic characteristic of victims. Among the 106 homicide situations considered for this study, only the ages of twenty-four (22.6%) victims were available. In contrast, such data was available for 82 (77.3%) of the offenders. In order to fill this gap, a cross-sectional population-based survey of homicide convicts was conducted in Gondar Correctional facility (December 2017). Assisted by an inmate and employing convenience sampling, 66 homicide convicts consented to participate in the study (31 from West-Armachiho, 16 from Dembiya, and 19 from Takussa districts).

Data Collection Instruments

To collect data about the structure of the homicide situation (comprising the offender, victim, and offense characteristics), a check-list was adapted from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (NYSDCJS, 2013) Supplementary Homicide Report

and other previous researches. The fields contained in the check-list were about the temporal and spatial characteristics of the homicide situation, the social and demographic attributes of the victims and the offenders, the victim-offender relationship as well as other situational characteristics (spatio-temporal, the number of victims and offenders involved, the weapons used to slay the victim, the motives behind the killing, and the use of alcohol or drug immediately before the incident) were compiled from the police crime records. This same instrument was adapted and used in the survey of homicide convicts after pretesting.

Data Analysis

Various data analysis techniques and tools were employed. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools (percentages), measures of association (chi squares) and test of variance (t-test). The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version.23) was used for quantitative data analysis. Homicide cases constructed from police crime records were presented along with the quantitative analyses under important themes to make sense of the dynamics of the homicide incident.

The study area

The study was conducted in three districts of North Gondar Administrative zone: West-Armachiho, Dembiya, and Takussa. West-Armachiho district (High Homicide District, HHD) is located at a distance of 197 km west of Gondar city. In 2012/13, the district was estimated to have a total population of 37,619. The center of the district is Ahrhajira town. In terms of climate, the district is warm semi-arid (*kolla*). Dembiya district (Medium Homicide District, MHD) is located 20 km south of the city of Gondar. Its center is Koladiba town. In 2012/13, the population of the district was estimated to be 301,073. It has a cool sub-humid (*weyna-dega*) climate. The third study district was Takussa (Low Homicide District, LHD). Delgi town is its center with moderate climate, and is located 95 km southwest of Gondar town. In 2012/13, the district had an estimated population size of 142,618. Dembiya and Takussa are neighboring districts.

Ethical Considerations

This study was particularly based on analysis of existing police homicide documents and survey of homicide convicts. Entry to the field was made possible through a letter of support Ref No: SoCI.438/003/01/07 written from the Department of Sociology, University of Gondar. Concerned officers at all levels gave permission to access the available documents. We have assured that no personal identifiers were taken from the files to the check-list. Special care was given to homicide convicts to freely communicate their views by introducing a comfortable approach whereby an inmate was recruited to contact potential respondents on voluntary basis. Furthermore, it is noted that anonymity

and confidentiality are the two most important ethical norms that a researcher conducting study on very sensitive and personal issues should abide by (Babbie, 2010; Berg, 2001). To ensure the observance of anonymity, the research participants, at all stage of the inquiry, were assured that they would not be identified by their name or any characteristic that implies them. In the case of presenting homicide narratives, case numbers are used. Thus, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity were handled in a way that did not affect the quality of the data and overall findings of the study.

Results

Social and Demographic Characteristics of the Victim(s) and the Offender(s)

For a sound homicide intervention, it is essential to know the social and demographic characteristics of both the victim(s) and offender(s) involved in homicide. The social and demographic variables of interest in this section include sex, age, marital status, occupation and educational attainment of both the victim and the offender.

Sex and Age

Data obtained from police records indicated that men are disproportionately victims of homicide. Among the 106 records consisting of 107 victims, the majority (ninety-eight or 91.6%) were men. Less than one-tenth (8.42%) of the homicide victims were women.

Table 1. Sex of Victims and Offenders

Sex	Victim's	Offender's
Male	98 (91.58%)	122 (99.2%)
Female	9 (8.42%)	1 (0.8%)
N	107 (100%)	123 (100%)

Source: Police Crime Records (2010-2015)

Turning to the offender's sex, the data indicate that, all the perpetrators (122 offenders) were men while only one woman was reported as co-offender in one homicide incident. Although there were at least 96 offenders involved in the 66 homicide situations, only the sex of 83 (66 principal and 17 co-offenders) offenders was documented; and all of them were men. This indicates that homicide is a masculine enterprise. However, sex of homicide victims was independent of the district's homicide rate implying that men and women were killed in similar proportions in the districts ($\chi^2=4.11$, $df=2$, $\alpha=0.128$).

Table 2. Sex and the victim-Offender Relationship

Victim's sex	Affine	Close friends	stranger	Acquaintance	Unknown
Male	8 (66.7%)	15 (93.8%)	2 (100%)	68 (66.7%)	5 (100%)
Female	4 (33.3%)	1 (6.2%)	0 (0%)	4 (33.3%)	0 (0%)
N	12 (100%)	16 (100%)	2 (100%)	72 (100%)	5 (100%)

Source: Police Crime Records (2010-2015)

As Table 2 shows, except for one incident where a woman took part as co-offender, all men victims were killed by men and most (92%) of them were acquaintances. Among these, close friends and acquaintances were, in large proportions (84%), men's slayers. Not surprisingly, women (though a minority as victims) were killed more frequently by a family member than a close friend. Among the 106 homicide situations, only the ages of twenty-four (22.6%) victims were available. In contrast, information about socio-demographic characteristics was available for 82 (77.3%) of the offenders.

The survey of homicide convicts yields information for about sixty-six homicide situations that led to the death of sixty-eight victims. Nearly three-fourth of the victims were between 20 and 40 years of age. The 25—29 age category represented the most vulnerable group to homicide victimization where a quarter of the victims were found. The general impression is that homicide victimization is less frequent among teenagers and starts to mount in the early twenties, goes up to its highest after the mid-twenties until it starts to decline at age forty (see Table 3).

Table 3. Ages of victims, principal offenders, and co-offenders

Age group	Victims	Principal Offender	Co-offenders
15—19 years	6 (8.8%)	1 (1.5%)	1 (6.3)
20—24 years	8 (11.8%)	7 (10.6%)	5 (31.3)
25—29 years	17 (25%)	27 (40.9%)	9 (56.3)
30—34 years	13 (19.1%)	15 (22.7%)	1 (6.3)
35—39 years	12 (17.6%)	12 (18.2%)	0 (0%)
40—44 years	10(14.7%)	1 (1.5%)	0 (0%)
45—49 years	2 (2.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
>=50 years	0 (0%)	3 (4.5%)	0 (0%)
N	68 (100%)	66 (100%)	16 (100%)

Source: Survey of Homicide Convicts, 2017

Convicts were also asked to provide information about themselves (and the demographics of their abettors (known here as *co-offenders*). It was found out that most (>80%) of the

principal offenders were between 25 and 40 years. Most co-offenders were between 20 and 30 years. Overall, the 20—40 years age group was the most frequent category where most of the principal (90%) and co-offenders were found. Similar evidence was also obtained from police crime records (PCR) which contains data on 77.4% of the principal offenders. The majority of them (80.5%) were between 20 and 40 years. The t-test statistic shows that there was no statistically significant difference in the mean age between homicide victims and principal offenders, which implies that homicide was committed relatively amongst peers. The paired sample t-test statistic shows ($t\text{-cal}_{0.05}=0.131$; $t\text{-critical}_{0.05}=1.6688$) that the victim's and the offender's age were not statistically different implying that homicide was committed relatively amongst peers

Marital Status of Victims and Offenders

Since Police Crime Records (PCR) did not contain information about the victim's marital status, the following descriptions were organized based on data obtained from survey of homicide convicts.

Table 4. Marital Status of the victim and offenders (Principal and Co-offenders)

Marital Status	Victim	Principal offender	Co-offender
Never married	22 (32.4%)	31(47%)	12 (70%)
Married	40 (58.8%)	35 (53%)	5 (29.4%)
Unknown	6 (8.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
N	68 (100%)	66 (100%)	17 (100%)

Source: Survey of Homicide Convicts (2017)

As the data indicates, more than half of the victims (58.8%) were married and one-third (32.3%) were single; and still married and single principal offenders were 53% (35) and 47% (31) respectively. However, co-offenders were largely unmarried (70%). Marital status seemed to have no relation with victimization and offending.

Occupation and Educational Attainment of Victims and Offenders

Police Crime Records contained information about the occupation of 80 (75%) of the victims. Accordingly, the majority (74%) of the victims were farmers, nine (11%) were daily laborers and seven (9%) were housewives. The same source indicated that 75% of the offenders were farmers while 16.3% were daily laborers. Members of the police and militia committed six (5.8%) homicides not connected to their official duty.

Table 5. Victims' and Offender's Occupation

	Victim	Offender
Farmer	59 (73.75%)	78(75%)
Daily laborer	9 (11.25%)	17(16.34%)
House wife	7 (8.75%)	0 (0.0%)
Others	5 (6.25%)	9(8.66%)
Total	80 (100%)	104 (100%)

Source: Police Crime Records (2010-2015)

The data obtained from survey of homicide convicts show that out of 68 homicide victims, 59 (86.8%) were farmers while eight (11.8%) were daily laborers. 63 (76.8%) and 19 (23.2%) of the offenders were farmers and daily laborers, respectively. The two data sources indicate that farmers and daily laborers were affected by homicide.

Killings in Dembiya and Takussa districts were, particularly, due to farmers engaging in land disputes and revenge killings. In West-Armachiho district, wage laborers were responsible for almost half of the homicide incidents. Since labor intensive commercial farming is practiced, there is seasonal migration of wage laborers to the district. These transitory wage laborers (locally known as the *sallugs*) often engage in deadly gang fights common at local bars during the night time. The survey data also supports this finding where more than one-third of the homicide convicts from West-Armachiho were the *sallugs*. Statistical tests indicated that occupation of offenders was significantly associated with the district's homicide rate ($\chi^2=33.664$, $df=4$ Chi square critical ($df=4$) =9.49 ($\alpha=0.05$); 13.28 ($\alpha=0.01$)).

In terms of educational level, the majority of the offenders (75.8%) and convicts (73%) were unable to read and write. Poor education has strong implications in limiting life's opportunities that again influence involvement in violence.

Spatial and temporal characteristics of homicide situations

According to Cohen and Felson (1979), homicide involves the interaction of a suitable target and a motivated offender in the absence of capable guardians. Under this perspective, victims are said to be in the wrong place at a wrong time.

As it can be seen in table 1, data about the spatial characteristic of 103 homicide situations was available in Police Crime Records. These places are often categorized as "In the Home" and "Outside Home".

Table 6. Spatial characteristics of the homicide situation

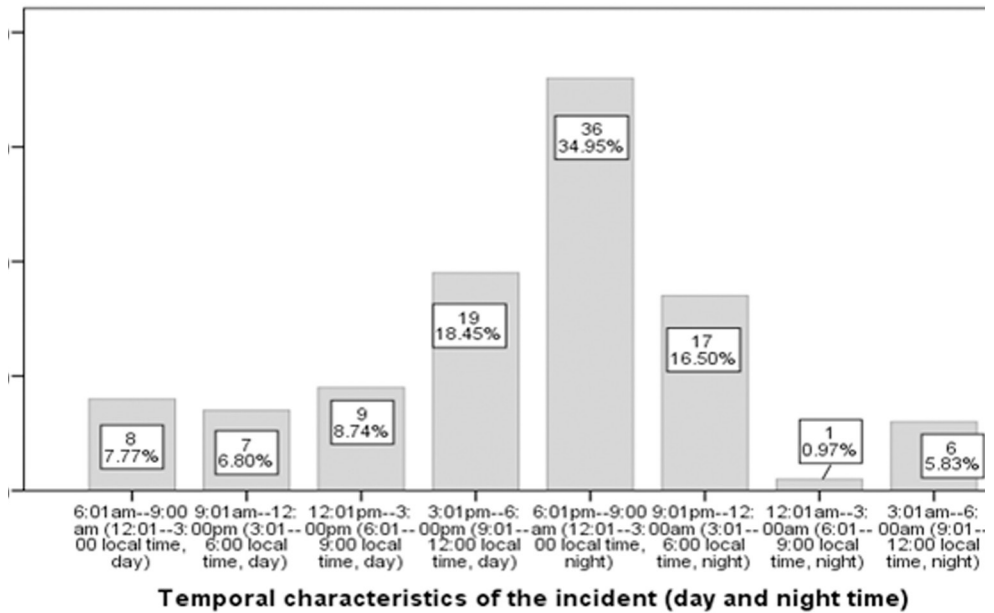
Districts	Place	
	In the home	Outside the home
West-Armachiho District (HHD)	0 (0.0%)	32 (35.16%)
Dembiya District (MHD)	10 (83.3%)	39 (42.85%)
Takussa District (LHD)	2 (16.7%)	20 (21.97%)
N	12 (100%)	91 (100%)

Source: Police Crime Records (2010-2015)

It is found that most of the homicide situations occurred outside the home (88.3%) while some (11.7%) were committed in one's home. Dembiya had the highest record of homicide situations (20.4%) committed in the home. More than 90% of the homicide situations occurred outside the home. The distinction between "Home" and "Outside Home" as locations for homicide situations bears sociologically significant meaning when it is examined in terms of the victim-offender relationship. It is expected from the routine activities approach that routines centering around one's home shape the social distance between the victim and the offender so that homicides that occur in the "Home" are more likely to involve family members (spouses, parents, and other kinsmen). Acquaintance and stranger homicides are more likely to be committed "outside the home" than "inside the home".

Consistent with expectations, in West-Armachiho district where no homicide was reportedly committed at one's home, offenders and their victims had no blood or marriage relationships. Thirty incidents involving close friends and acquaintances occurred outside the home. In Dembiya district, nearly 80% of the homicide situations happened outside the home and were between acquaintances (59%), close friends (6%) and affines (6%). Killings at home were recorded in ten (20%) homicides and often involved acquaintances (6 cases) and affines (4 cases). In Takussa district, most of the incidents were committed outside the home and mainly occurred between acquaintances (9 cases), friends (5 cases), and affines (5 other cases). The evidences attest that the location where homicides occur is associated with the dispersion of activities outside the home that also involved variance in the victim-offender relationships.

Figure 1. Temporal Characteristics (three-hour interval) of the Homicide Incident (Day and Night time)



Source: Police Crime Records (2010-2015)

Just like location, the timing of homicides reveals identifiable patterns in line with the tempo of social activities. Most (70%) homicide situations were committed between the late-afternoon and midnight (3:00pm and 12:00am). The distribution reaches its peak between the three hours in the afternoon (6:00pm and 9:00pm) with 35% of the incidents; and starts to decline thereafter until it shows another rise after 4:00am. This latter period is preferred by blood avengers who plan an ambush attack against their adversary. From among the nighttime homicides, more than 85% of them were committed between 6:00pm and 12:00am (evening to midnight).

Nonetheless, the frequency of homicides during the daytime comprised a slightly lower proportion (41.74%) than the nighttime homicides and had a relatively stable distribution. From the routine activities approach, it is expected that times of the day that allow people to have close interaction are likely to exhibit higher frequencies than those in which the pace of social activity slackens. Thus, during the day time, people might interact with friends, acquaintances, or affines regarding matters of importance. Daytime homicides between close friends (66%) occurred between 3:00pm and 12:00pm. With the same period, 54 (78%) homicides involving acquaintances occurred. This was the most visible temporal pattern in accordance with the victim-offender relationship. However, there was

no such unique time that could be linked to killings between affines; since they have physical and social intimacy (disputes over matters of property inheritance), time might not be a factor of affinal homicide.

Again, as it can be observed from Figure 1, more than half of the homicide incidents were committed during the nighttime; and it appeared that Dembiya district had more nocturnal homicides than the other two districts. The chi-square test ($\chi^2=1.733$, $df=2$, $sig.=0.420$ χ^2 critical=5.991, $df=2$) also confirmed the existence of a significant association between temporal patterning (as day or night) and the district where homicide occurred.

Similar to times of the day, homicide tends to be frequently committed in certain months when social activity or interaction is high (see Table 2). Since farming is the main means of livelihood for most people in the zone, homicide is linked to farming related activities as data from police crime records reveal. For example, the months of February, April, July, and August tended to experience relatively higher homicide rates (42.4%). This was particularly evident in Dembiya where farm land disputes were common with the onset of the farming season.

In West-Armachiho, gang fights over trivial matters and robbery homicides were rampant among migrant wage laborers (the *sallugs*) who moved to the district in large numbers from other districts. The *sallugs* are diverse and highly mobile young men who stay in host districts (West-Armachiho, Quara, and Metemma) for a brief period (for two months during the weeding period (July and August) and for another two months during harvesting time (November and December)).

Between December and February, thirty (28.3%) homicides were committed. This corresponds to a number of factors associated with the structure of routine activities. First, in December, farmers often sell out their produce and tend to frequent drinking places in nearby towns. Alcohol-mediated encounters between individuals would precipitate in death when the parties involved are already drunk which is a routine experience for farmers to visit drinking houses just after the market.

In many cases, the dates between 18 and 29 in January correspond to the Epiphany festivity and other related social and cultural occasions in Ethiopia. During this time, young and adult males participate in games that are dangerous and deadly. In Dembiya and Takussa districts, the *essaay* game where two young men engage in a competition for self-defense using long and strong sticks is a common practice following Epiphany. It is, thus, likely that individuals transgress the rules of the game, and thus bludgeoned to death (among the nine deaths recorded in January for the past five years, six were committed in the days mentioned above).

Other Circumstances Associated with Homicide Situations

Homicide is not merely the result of two or more persons having unwelcome interactions. In addition to the actors, there are elements associated with the homicide situation. These include the number of actors involved, the victim-offender relationship, weapons used, the motive that initiated the killing, and the role of alcohol. Each of these circumstances is discussed in the following subsections.

a. Number of Offenders and Victims Involved in the Homicide Situation

In many cases, homicide is a one-on-one encounter. Police crime records show that “single victim-single offender” homicide interactions make up more than half of the incidents. Homicide situations involving multiple offenders in slaying a single victim were also frequently recorded (42%). Two homicide cases involved multiple offenders and multiple victims in Dembiya district. There were homicide situations in which a single offender caused the death of multiple individuals (Single-offender multiple-victim). Single offender-single victim homicides were very common (in more than 65% of the cases) in West-Armachiho and Takussa districts. The single-victim multiple-offenders typology whereby an individual is killed by a mob of adversaries was particularly reported in Dembiya district. In Dembiya district, about half (50%) of the homicides involved multiple offenders.

b. The Victim-Offender Relationship: Who Kills Who?

The victim-offender relationship has been an important area of interest in homicide research (Wolfgang, 1967). According to Police Crime Records (PCR), 101 incidents (95.2%) involved victims and offenders who had, at least, some kind of acquaintance. Sixteen (15.1%) incidents happened between close friends and twelve (11.3%) among those who were related by blood and/or marriage (affines). Data show that homicides committed by strangers were found to be rare in the study districts. In five (4.7%) the homicide situations, victim-offender relationship was not established.

Similarly, the survey data among convicts indicated that most homicidal interactions happened amongst acquaintances (54.5%). A quarter of the homicides were between affines, and twelve (18.2%) occurred among strangers.

Table 7. The victim-offender relationship

Districts	Relationship		
	Affines	Close friends	Acquaintances
West-Armachiho District (HHD)	0 (0.0%)	5 (31.25%)	25 (35.2%)
Dembiya District (MHD)	6 (50%)	5 (31.25%)	37 (52.1%)
Takussa District (LHD)	6 (50%)	6 (37.5%)	9 (12.3%)
N	12 (100%)	16 (100%)	71 (100%)

Source: Police Crime Records (2010-2015)

Furthermore, it is important to examine whether the victim-offender relationship could be associated with the district's homicide rate (high, medium, or low) while excluding stranger homicide (which was rare, 1.9%) and homicides where the relationship between the victim and the offender were unknown (4.5%). It appears that acquaintance homicide was common among the three districts; and this was particularly prominent in West-Armachiho district (83.3%) associated with migrant wage laborers. In Dembiya and Takussa districts homicides tended to involve close friends and affines in varying proportions besides acquaintances. There is statistically significant association between these two categorical variables ($n=99$) ($\chi^2=14.461$, with $df=4$ was greater than the critical (9.49) region with $df=4$ at $\alpha=0.05$)).

c. Weapons used to kill victims

In a conflict situation, the use of weapons, particularly, guns to resolve conflict situations may end up being deadly. Police Crime Records provides complete information on the types of weapons used to slay victims (table 8). In about a quarter of the homicide situations, guns were used. Blunt instruments (like bludgeons, stone, rope) were also widely used in forty-two (40%) of the homicide situations. Sharp instruments (knives, *ferar/small axe*) were identified in twenty-one (20%) homicide situations. Multiple weapons (a combination of guns, sticks, and sharp instruments) were used in seventeen (16%) of the homicide situations.

Table 8. Types of weapons involved in the homicide situations

Districts	Weapons		
	Gun	Sharp instrument (knife, axe)	Blunt instruments (stick, stone, rope)
West-Armachiho District (HHD)	6 (19.35%)	18 (50%)	13 (22.8%)
Dembiya District (MHD)	19 (61.3%)	14 (39%)	30 (52.6%)
Takussa District (LHD)	6 (19.35%)	4 (11.1%)	14 (24.6%)
N	31 (100%)	36 (100%)	57 (100%)

Source: Police Crime Records (2010-2015)

The type of weapon employed is statistically associated with the districts' homicide rate ($\chi^2=14.749$, $df=6$, sig., =0.22). In West-Armachiho, the use of both sharp and blunt instruments (especially knife and bludgeon) was common. Homicides in Dembiya and Takussa districts were frequently committed by the aid of blunt materials like sticks, stones, and rope. And in Dembiya district, there were situations where all the three typologies were employed.

d. What motivates people to kill other people?

A central question to homicide studies is why people kill other people. A motivated murderer may plan to kill a person for whatever reason (robbery or revenge); and still in other circumstances, personal confrontations without a prior intention may result in death. Generally, homicide situations can be either instrumental (committed for pure

material gain) or expressive (committed for expressing some kind of emotional discontent) based on the offender's motive (Block & Block, 1991).

Police Crime Records contain information about the perceived or real reasons suspects killed their victims for 74 (70%) of the homicide situations. Among these, 35 (47%) homicides precipitated due to altercations over trivial (but socially significant) matters. Here is an instance of an aggravated altercation:

One morning in the month of June (farming season in 2011), the offender (37 years old) and the victim (both siblings/brothers) were plowing their farm land located adjacent to each other. Unfortunately disputes raged as both couldn't agree about the border that separated their plots. The offender picked up a stone and hit his brother on the head. The victim died soon after the attack. [Case #33, Takussa district] **Expressive—Simple altercation**

Revenge killings were also common. Taking a previous killing as an excuse, individuals acting in accordance with the social norm, avenge the death of their close kin (in 25.7%) by killing the killer or a person equivalent to the victim in the slayer's family. The cultural norms of the society in the zone do not approve of the killing of women, children and the elderly in retaliation. Here is one case:

The offender had planned to avenge the death of his close kin by killing the murderer. He went out hunting the victim during the evening. Around 8:00pm, he spotted the victim while returning to his home. Armed with an AK-47 automatic gun, the offender shot the victim on his head. [Case# 37, Takussa] **Expressive—revenge**

Homicides with instrumental motives such as robbery also occurred (10%). Here is an example of instrumental-robbery homicide.

A 19-years-old young man had gone to West-Armachiho district with his cousin to work in the commercial farms. Staying for a couple of months there, they got their wage and were about to return home. With malice-afore-thought, the offender planned to rob the victim. He got an idea to take him to a nearby river under the pretext of taking a bath. With the aid of the victim to rub him off his dirt, he took the first turn. Moments later, the victim was taking his turn. The offender covered the victim's body and face with soap foam to obstruct his vision. Soon, he took out a knife; stabbed him repeatedly on different parts of his body to death. Finally, he took the money from the victim's pocket and fled. [Case #15, West-Armachiho) **Instrumental-robbery**

Another motive for homicide to occur was disputes over land which led to 16 (24%) deaths. Since farming is the main source of livelihood in the study areas and land is a scarce resource, controversies about land ownership and inheritance are very sensitive to make

death happen to an adversary. The following case portrays this instance:

A 20-years-old son (offender) had a history of conflict with his mother (victim) over an issue of land. He knew he would only inherit his mother's land when she died. One day, the victim planned to travel to another town to visit a clinic while her son was giving her a company to the nearby town (Delgi) in Takussa district. Around 5:00 pm, in the late night and in the midst of their trip crossing a river, he stoned her to death and buried her body on a riverside. [Case# 34, Takussa] **Instrumental—Land dispute/inheritance**

Homicide may occur on the same day of confrontation. But it is likely that some people may take revenge for an insult or previous conflict at another time (13.6% homicides were due to this). Other reasons or motives which were not significant include conflict over money, reckless gun handling, and jealousy or love triangle in combination resulted in 8 (12.1%) homicide deaths.

e. Presence of Alcohol Prior to the Homicide Situation

As mentioned earlier, we have seen that drinking houses were the major hotspots areas for deadly conflicts to take place. Alcohol affects a person's ability to make right judgments when it is taken excessively. Given the entire population of alcohol consumers, not all who drank kill or are killed (Wolfgang, 1967). Alcohol or drug related intoxication reduces internal controls and provide instant courage to commit homicide. Police Crime Records indicated that alcohol was involved in 15 (14.1%) homicide situations where either or both of the actors drank immediately before the act.

Data from homicide convicts shows that in more than half of the homicide situations, either the offenders or their victims or both have taken alcohol (local alcoholic beverages such as *tella, araqi*) or beer shortly before the incident. While both parties were drunk in several of the incidents (48.5%), only the offender(s) drank in only two reported incidents.

Discussion

Previously, data from Police Crime Records (PCR) and survey of homicide convicts were presented and analyzed to reflect on the various aspects of the homicide situation in the study area. Analysis and interpretation of the data is guided by the routine activities approach (RAA) (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Predatory crimes like homicide are viewed as the result of unwelcome encounters between a motivated slayer and a suitable victim where nobody was able to stop the acts from happening (Cohen & Felson, 1979). This perspective holds that the lifestyles individuals pursue (routine activities) condition the risk of homicide victimization and offending. The unit of analyses was the "homicide situation" comprising the characteristics of the victim and the offender and other circumstantial attributes that define the homicide (Miethe & Regoeczi, 2004).

When we observe the sex and age of victims and offenders, the findings are consistent with previous findings (Azarbakshsh *et al.*, 2023; Brookman, 2005; Miethe & Regoeczi, 2004; UNODC, 2023) that men and young persons were disproportionately represented as victims and offenders of homicide. It appears that homicide is a masculine phenomenon. When a woman is found in the records, it was because she was a victim rather than an offender. Besides this, young and adult males (age between 25 and 40) represented the remarkable proportion both as offenders (>80%) and victims (>61%) of homicide. In general, risk of homicide offending and victimization tend to be positively related with age after 25 (years). The lifestyle of men associated with normative expectations has put them to disproportionate risks of homicide victimization and offending. Within this perspective, men's routines tend to be outside the home that subsequently makes them to have contacts with diverse people. When men become victims of homicide outside and far from home, their slayer is likely to be a friend, an acquaintance or a stranger. In contrast, women and the elderly are more often killed by their family members or spouses.

Considering marital status, we found that married persons were more frequently victims of homicide than the unmarried. There are reports of other forms of intimate partner violence (Gedefa *et al.*, 2024; Getinet *et al.*, 2022), but we did not find spousal homicide in our study

The place where a homicide occurs had significance in previous researches (Caywood, 1998; Decker, 1993; Messner & Tardiff, 1985) as it allows identifying the "hot spots" of deadly incidents. Pertaining time and space, our findings revealed that most homicides occurred "outside the home" (88%). This contrasts with the finding by Wolfgang (1967) where many of the homicides occurred in the home. Temporally, the time between the late afternoon and midnight (3:00pm—12am) was risky as 70% of the homicides occurred. Nighttime homicides were more common in Dembiya district than West-Armachiho and Takussa districts.

An important factor in sociological criminology that is useful for explaining crime is occupation. However, occupation does not have a direct relationship with homicide like the other socio-demographic variables mentioned earlier. One's occupation may either limit or facilitate interaction with specific categories of people. In this study, more than 40% of the homicides were recorded in February, April, July, and August. This is associated with the beginning of the farming season that increases the pace of social activity and the frequency of interpersonal interaction. This finding is consistent with local studies (Jibat & Nigussie, 2015; Sewnet, 2012) that reported aggravated assault and homicide common among farmers in rural areas. This is how occupation and location interact to affect homicide victimization and offending by influencing lifestyle.

We find that the homicide encounter was mainly the outcome of solitary individuals (single victim-single offender) killing each other (56.6%) in the absence of bystanders to prevent it. Collectively attacking and killing an individual was most common in Dembiya district (50%). Consistent with previous studies (Matzopoulos *et al.*, 2024; Sewnet, 2012) slayers and their victims had, in most cases (95%), prior acquaintance. Stranger and

spousal homicides were very rare. Turning to the use of weapons, it was found that blunt instruments (sticks, stone, and rope) were frequently involved as means to kill victims. Although the relationship between guns and homicide is not conclusive (Miron, 2001) guns were involved in a quarter of the incidents.

Similar to the finding by Miethe and Regoeczi (2004), the most common motive for deadly interaction among people in the three districts were identified as expressive in their nature as conflicts over trivial matters (47%) escalated into deaths. Revenge killing was the second most frequent (25.7%) reason for homicide. Analyses of survey data among convicts indicated that, alcohol (report that one or both of the actors were excessively drunk) was involved in more than half the homicide situations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In general, differences in homicide situations among the three study districts were observed in most accounts. The three districts differ in terms their homicide rates, in many aspects of the homicide situations and the structure of routine activities. The homicide situations in the three districts were characterized by young men as victims and offenders. Particular times of the day and seasons exposed people to homicide victimization. The high homicide rate in West-Armachiho district was closely associated with the farming season that attracted numerous migrant wage laborers who were disproportionately homicide victims and offenders. In contrast, homicide situations in Dembiya and Takussa districts were mainly characterized by land related disputes among farmers. The role of sharp and other instruments in homicide were significant which counters the common-sense assumption that the availability of guns was solely responsible for high homicide rates in some districts of the zone.

We recommend that law enforcement agencies should deploy sufficient human resource in places where and during the times and seasons when the pace of social activity get intense particularly in Wes-Armachiho district. Introducing land ownership certificates would lessen homicides related to land disputes in Dembiya and Takussa districts. We also recommend further study that may examine the role of durable social and cultural factors that led to variation in homicide among districts in the zone.

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the Addis Ababa University and University of Gondar for their financial support. We are also grateful for police officers, prosecutors, judges, and prison personnel at all levels of the hierarchy, from the zone down to the *kebele*, for rendering their relentless support until the necessary data were collected. We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.

Conflict of Interest: We declare no conflict of interest

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