



HOMICIDIOS
EN AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE
Hacia una información de calidad



BOGOTÁ 7 al 9 de Septiembre de 2015

**FIRST DRAFT OF PROPOSALS
PROTOCOL ON HOMICIDE DATA QUALITY IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

This preliminary version and the subsequent drafts of the protocol to be discussed throughout the conference can be found at the website: <http://conferenciahomicidiosbogota2015.org/>

Introduction

The protocol on homicide data quality seeks to establish several criteria whose implementation would ensure that homicide data have high levels of validity, reliability, and transparency.

The existence of valid and reliable data is essential for designing and evaluating homicide prevention policies. Moreover, data subject to rigorous and uniform quality criteria facilitate international comparability.

In principle, the objective is not to separate, as a dichotomy, high and low quality data, but rather to offer a metric that allows one to determine to what extent certain data may be considered quality data. Therefore, the proposal is that the criteria be complementary, gradual, and cumulative. Accordingly, a country or an agency that produces data could meet some of these criteria but not others, such that this exercise would indicate what could be done to improve in the future.

The ultimate goal of this process is for the countries and agencies that produce data to sign on, as a way to inspire them to gradually increase data quality.

This proposal was formulated in an earlier seminar on the same topic, held in December 2014 in Rio de Janeiro with the participation of 14 persons from six countries of the region. Subsequently, it was spelled out in greater detail based on the technical study “Quality of Homicide Data in Latin America,” which was produced by the Laboratory for the Analysis of Violence at the University of Rio de Janeiro (LAV-UERJ) as an input for this conference and that can be consulted at the website <http://conferenciahomicidiosbogota2015.org/>. Thus, the specific thresholds proposed for some of these criteria, in terms of percentage, for example, took into account the current reality of the region reflected in that study. The specific thresholds tend to be better than the average for the countries of the region, but not so high that they become unattainable or non-existent in the Latin American context.

The criteria proposed are grouped in nine thematic areas depending on their content. Some of them include more than one criterion. Obviously, these areas, as well as their content, will be subject to alterations, additions or suppressions in the course of the discussion.

The nine areas proposed are as follows:

1. UNIT OF RECORDING. The unit of recording for homicides should always be the victim and not the incident or the police record. Accordingly, when two or more people are homicide victims in the same incident, each of the victims should be recorded individually.

2. DEFINITION OF HOMICIDE. Homicide is defined, for the present purpose, as the death of a person caused by an intentional act of aggression by another person or persons. Negligent and accidental homicides are excluded as well as intentional attempted homicides that were not consummated. One should also include deaths due to aggressions committed by law enforcement agents in the exercise of their professional duty, even when lawful, as well as deaths brought about by the lawful exercise of self-defense by any person. The operative concept of homicide would thus be identified with the sum of the categories of the WHO's International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) referred to "death by assault" (codes X85 and Y09) and "death due to legal intervention" (code Y35). In criminal records one finds differences in the ways the countries classify deaths resulting from police interventions.

In this regard, the proposal is that the definition of homicides not be limited by their legal classification, which varies from country to country and often includes several crimes (infanticide, femicide, injury followed by death, etc.), but by a general concept that does not depend on the legality or illegality of the facts. This option has two advantages. The first is that it maximizes international comparability, for any categorization that varies based on legal definitions will necessarily be different in different countries. The second is that public policy should seek to minimize deaths due to aggression regardless of their legality. For example, states should seek to reduce, insofar as possible, deaths as a result of police interventions, even when they result from the lawful conduct of public agents.

In addition, taking the legal criterion as the basis for the definition of homicide could entail a greater delay in the processing of information since judges, who are the ones who ultimately determine the legality, of an act, may take months or even years to hand down a verdict.

In summary, the definition proposed here is distinguished from the one traditionally adopted by the UNODC on homicides (including the International Classification of Crimes for Statistical Purposes of 2015), which is based precisely on illegality.¹

In any event, the definition adopted should allow an operative definition that is as close as possible to the two sources considered: criminal records and death certificates.

Still to be decided is whether intentional deaths caused by armed conflicts and by civil disturbances should or should not be incorporated into this concept of homicide. In support of combining all these intentional deaths is the fact that Goal 16 that is being negotiated as part of the post-millennium goals by the United Nations is to "promote peaceful and inclusive

¹ The International Classification of Crimes for Statistical Purposes considers homicide, like any other crime, based on its unlawfulness. Thus, the definition of homicide that it proposes is "an illegal death inflicted on a person with the intent of causing death or serious injury."

societies” broadly, which would include any type of violence, including wars. However, the fact that wars are episodic and catastrophic and do not have any pattern with foreseeable evolution is an argument against including deaths in wars. Another problem is the distinction between wars and civil conflicts, always tenuous despite standards for this purpose in international humanitarian law. In any case, Latin America does not have any international conflicts at present as defined by humanitarian law and there are very few cases of internal armed conflict.

3. INFORMATION TO BE RECORDED. The record of each homicide should include information on the victim, the incident, and the perpetrator. The minimum set of information that should be recorded is as follows:

a) Victim:

1. Sex
2. Date of birth or, if not available, approximate age
3. Schooling
4. Profession or occupation
5. Additional characteristics of victims relating to risk groups in light of the local context, such as race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic level, etc.
6. Place of residence of the victim, with the greatest possible detail

b) Incident:

1. Date and time of the fatal injury
2. Weapon with which the homicide was committed
3. Total number of mortal victims in this episode
4. Place of the assault, with the greatest possible detail. Identify the political-administrative unit and whether it corresponds to an urban or rural area.

c) Alleged perpetrator:

1. Sex
2. Date of birth or, if not available, approximate age
3. Relationship between victim and perpetrator
4. Whether alleged perpetrator is a public agent (and type of agent)

4. QUALITY OF THE DATA. There should be a maximum percentage of missing values in relation to the basic socio-demographic variables of homicide victims as a way of determining data quality:

- a) a maximum percentage of 1% of homicide victims whose sex is unknown;
- b) a maximum percentage of 3% of homicide victims whose age is unknown.

5. INDETERMINATE CASES. To ensure homicide data quality, one must determine a maximum percentage of ambiguous categories² for classifying deaths that may include homicides:

- a) A maximum percentage of 5% of deaths by external cause of undetermined intent (codes Y10 to Y34 of ICD- 10) out of the total number of deaths due to external causes.
- b) A maximum percentage of 2.5% of deaths due to external cause that occurred by unspecified means³ (codes Y09, Y34, Y35.7, and Y36.9 of the ICD-10) out of the total number of deaths due to external causes. The idea is that the means by which the homicide was committed is easier to identify than the intent, for it can be determined based exclusively on information from the autopsy. Therefore, the maximum percentage of cases in which the means are unknown should be lower than what is established for unknown intent.
- c) A maximum percentage of 5% of violent deaths, obtained through criminal records, in which it is not known whether they resulted from homicide. In other words, a maximum percentage of 5% of residual and temporary categories that could include homicides (finding of a corpse, death to be clarified, etc.) out of the total number of violent deaths (homicides + indeterminate deaths).

6. CONVERGENCE AMONG THE VARIOUS SOURCES. A high degree of convergence among homicides obtained from criminal records and death certificates is essential for ensuring the validity and reliability of both sources. Accordingly, a maximum limit of 20% discrepancy is established between the records from those two sources.

7. QUALITY CONTROL MECHANISMS. An official body will be established to oversee and monitor homicide data quality that includes all the official institutions that produce data and that also incorporates representatives of civil society, among them members of universities and research centers. This body will use techniques for measuring the full coverage and quality of official homicide data, including:

- a) individual cross-referencing of the victims from the two sources (criminal records and death certificates) to guarantee the coverage of both;

² We understand “ambiguous categories” to be those that can include homicides and also other cases that are not homicides, due the lack of information to clarify how the death actually happened. The most common examples are “deaths to be clarified” and “corpse found.”

³ These cases include “aggression by unspecified means” (code Y09), “deaths due to unspecified event, undetermined intent” (code Y34), “deaths by legal intervention, means unspecified” (code Y35.7), and “deaths in war operations, unspecified” (code Y36.9).

- b) supervision, by sampling, of homicide cases reported in the local and national press to see if these victims are contained in the official records.
- c) carrying out victimization surveys on homicides against members of the household using an appropriate methodology.

8. DISSEMINATION AND TRANSPARENCY. The official numbers on homicides, both national and local, will be publicly disseminated at least once every three months. Any subsequent modification of these numbers should be communicated to the official body for oversight and monitoring of data quality (see previous point), with the respective explanations. In addition to the figures, the micro-data on homicide, victim by victim, will be publicly disseminated, with the exception of information that may lead to their individual identification (name, identify number, address, etc.). In this sense, the information will be presented from the geographic point of view with reference to the smallest spatial unit that does not compromise the confidentiality of the victims' identity.

9. TIME FRAME. The maximum time for processing and final calculation of homicide data should be one year. In other words, homicide data for a given year based on both sources (criminal records and death certificates) should be released no later than at the end of the following year.