

## **Young women and violence in Russia: A study of homicide victimization rates.**

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Women in Russia are subjected to high risk of violent crime and homicide risk in particular. Homicide now is the leading cause of external mortality for Russian women. Compared to the United States and other Western countries, middle-aged and older women in Russia have anomalously high homicide victimization rates, which some researchers explain by domestic violence (see Pridemore, 2003). Pridemore (2003) compared male-female ratio of homicide victimization in Russia and the United States at different ages and found no significant differences in the rates for both countries. Thus, women in Russia do not demonstrate excessive mortality from homicide at older ages compared to males. On the contrary, at ages 25-54 male-female ratio is higher in Russia than in the United States implying that males at middle ages in Russia are at higher homicide risk than in the United States. Male-female homicide victimization ratio increased from 2.8 in 1981 to 3.43 in 2001. This tendency was not the same for younger age groups. In 1981, male-female homicide victimization ratio at middle ages was relatively low and then significantly increased. For example, male-female ratio at age 40-44 was 2.65 in 1981 and rose to 4.19 in 2001 demonstrating more rapid growth of homicide mortality in middle-aged males compared to females. Opposite tendency is observed for young adult group: homicide male-female ratio of young adults (20-24) declined from 4.54 in 1981 to 3.50 in 2001. Thus, homicide victimization rate of young females grew faster compared to young males, particularly in the 1990s (Gavrilova et al., 2002).

Time trajectories of homicide victimization rates for middle-aged males and females demonstrate similar pattern during the 1990s: rapid increase after 1989, peak in 1994 and short-term decline following by another increase in 1998. In 2001, homicide victimization rate for both males and females did not reach the levels observed in the year of peak mortality (1994). Homicide mortality of young males (20-24) follows the pattern demonstrated for the middle-aged group, but with slower growth of homicide rates after 1998. Young females (20-24), however, demonstrate another pattern: steady growth of homicide mortality during the 1990s, so that homicide mortality in 2001 hit the highest level never observed before for this age and gender. Thus, middle-aged males and young females were among the most adversely affected groups during the transition period. While adverse effects of market reforms on middle-aged male mortality is well documented (Shkolnikov et al., 1998; Notzon et al., 1998; Gavrilova et al., 2000; Pridemore, 2003), little attention is paid to the disturbing trend of homicide mortality in young females (Gavrilova et al., 2001; 2003). Higher involvement of young women in risky behavior (including prostitution and drug abuse) may be a possible explanation of this negative tendency, although more detailed research in this area are required to fully explore this issue.

Domestic violence is another factor of high homicide victimization rate of women in Russia. In addition to that, many cases of spousal homicides result from drinking of husband or both spouses. According to a case review in St. Petersburg, spousal homicides comprise 15% of all homicides, which is slightly higher than in the United States – 10% (see Gondolf, Shestakov, 1997). In about 60 to 75 percent of the Russian male-perpetrated spousal homicides, the offender had been drinking while in the United States this percentage is lower – 50-65%. Women in Russia fall victims of spousal homicide almost 3 times more often than in the United States: male-female ratio of spousal homicide level is 1:6 in Russia versus 1:2.3 in the United States (see Gondolf, Shestakov, 1997). These data demonstrate more vulnerable status of Russian women in family. Another difference of spousal homicides in Russia compared to the United States is low percentage of husband's suicide attempt after wife is murdered (8% vs 25% in the U.S.) and very few murders of children (30% in the U.S.). The authors believe that female homicides by husbands in Russia are related more to marital conflicts intensified by a lack of mobility and economic stress (see Gondolf, Shestakov, 1997). Lack of housing and women's shelters in Russia exacerbates the problem of domestic violence when women have to live with abusive spouses for many years (Zabelina, 2002).

In this study we conduct regional analyses of homicide victimization rates for young females, using multivariate regression and factor analyses with social-economic variables taken as covariates.

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