

POST-MORTEM SURVEY OF HOMICIDES IN SINGAPORE (1955-1964)

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The purpose of this study is to compare our homicidal rates with that of other countries. It is the intention of this paper to see if any particular pattern occurred in the racial groups, especially in relation with age and sex. We will study also the modes of homicide and the incidence in relation to the time of year.

MATERIALS

As all cases of homicides in Singapore were presented for post-mortem, the material for this report were obtained solely from our own post-mortem records. Every protocol of homicide cases were analysed for the ten-year period from 1955 to 1964.

RATE

The overall homicidal rate for the ten-year period was 3.2 per 100,000. The figures in the male was 5.2 and in the female it was 1.0 per 100,000 of population. These rates had remained fairly constant throughout the decade. The sudden rise in the male curve at the end of 1964 was due to a racial riot (Table I, Fig. 1).

Singapore could not be considered a very violent city with a rate of 3.2 per 100,000 (Table II). Thailand headed the list with a figure of 15.3, and Philippines was second with a rate of 8.7 per 100,000. In Asia, Singapore was a low third being ahead of Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong in that order. Comparing with the Caucasian countries, U.S.A. was the only country that surpassed the Singapore rate, her homicidal rate being 5.5.

RACE

Violent deaths among the 3 racial groups in Singapore, whether suicides or homicides showed similar patterns (Table III, Fig. 2). At the end of the Korean War in 1953, there was an influx of Indian labourers from the rubber estates in Malaya to Singapore. This relatively rapid upsurge of Indians in the labour market created a state of stress amongst the Indian community (Ting and Tan: Post Mortem Survey of Suicides in Singapore). The Indians had the highest rate in this early "stress" period. Since

that "stress" period there was an erratic but general decline for the rest of the decade. The Malays, a more sedate Muslim community, showed a low homicidal rate. The Singapore Chinese were more violent than their counterparts in Hong Kong and Taiwan, but their rate was quite constant throughout the decade.

SEX AND AGE

Males in Asian countries were more violent than their gentler sex. However, in western countries, the ratio between male and female was very close to unity. In Israel, there was a slight preponderance of female over male (Table IV).

Regarding the age distribution, most of the murdered persons in Singapore were in the younger age group—20 to 30 years. This was certainly due to the high rate of gangland murders. However, one must bear in mind that 50% of Singapore's population is under twenty-one and 68% is under thirty years (Table V, Fig. 3). If the rate was calculated according to per 100,000 of particular age groups, the incidence was highest in the 3rd decade, decreasing in the 4th and 5th decades (Table VI).

METHODS

As most of the homicides in Singapore were due to violent acts of passion or gang warfare, cutting and blunt instruments were the most favoured weapons, contributing 50.2% and 25.6% respectively to the total number of murders (Fig. 4).

Poisoning was not a method of choice despite the easy accessibility to many common poisons by the lay public.

Under "others", two died from blasts and the third was homicidal drowning of a boy by his parents. In the 10-year period, deaths from rape-murder numbered only three, which was very low compared to western countries.

TIME OF YEAR

As in suicide, there did not seem to be any favourite time of the year when homicide was

TABLE I

HOMICIDE RATE PER 100,000
POPULATION

Year	Male	Female	Total
1955	5.0	1.0	3.14
1956	5.5	1.3	3.6
1957	4.1	0.4	2.4
1958	4.5	1.1	2.9
1959	6.2	1.5	3.9
1960	5.3	0.6	3.1
1961	5.9	1.0	3.6
1962	3.8	1.7	2.8
1963	4.6	0.3	2.5
1964	7.4	0.8	4.2
MEAN	5.2	1.0	3.2

TABLE II

HOMICIDE RATE PER 100,000
POPULATION
(Excluding Death Resulting from
Operations of War)1965

Singapore	-	-	-	-	3.2
Thailand	-	-	-	-	15.3
Philippines	-	-	-	-	8.7
Japan	-	-	-	-	1.4
Taiwan	-	-	-	-	1.3
Hong Kong	-	-	-	-	0.9
America (U.S.)	-	-	-	-	5.5
Australia	-	-	-	-	1.4
Israel	-	-	-	-	0.9
France	-	-	-	-	0.8
United Kingdom	-	-	-	-	0.6
Switzerland	-	-	-	-	0.6

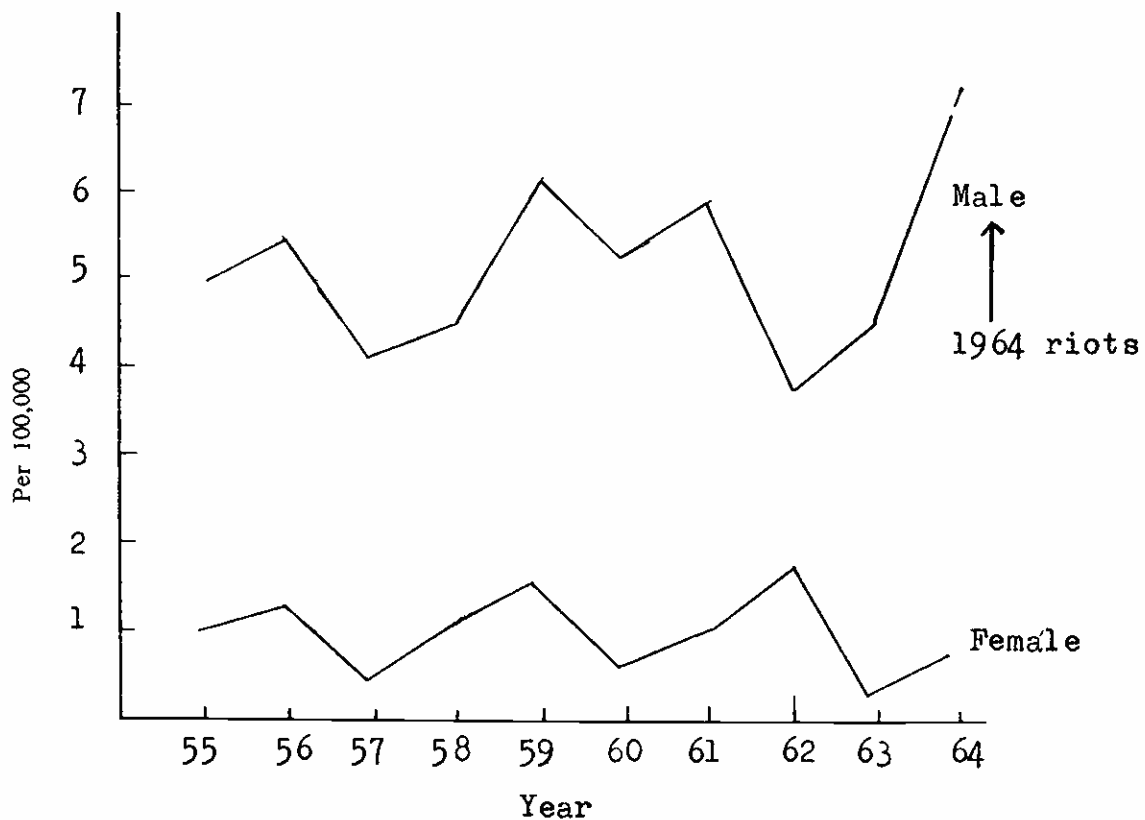


Fig. 1. Total Homicide rate per 100,000 of Population.

TABLE III

HOMICIDE RATE PER 100,000 OF EACH RACIAL GROUP IN SINGAPORE

Year	Chinese	Indian	Malay	Others
1955	3.2	6.4	0	16.7
1956	3.3	7.7	2.2	16.0
1957	1.7	8.9	1.5	9.2
1958	3.2	2.3	1.9	8.8
1959	4.4	4.5	1.8	0
1960	3.1	5.8	0	31.5
1961	3.9	6.4	0.4	0
1962	3.1	2.8	0.8	14.1
1963	2.4	6.2	0.4	2.0
1964	3.7	4.7	7.4	6.6
MEAN	3.2	5.6	1.7	10.1

TABLE IV

HOMICIDE RATE FOR MALE AND FEMALE IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

Country	Male	Female	Ratio
Singapore:			
Chinese	5.4	0.9	6.1
Indian	7.0	2.6	2.7:1
Malay	2.5	0.7	3.6:1
Thailand	27.1	3.5	7.8:1
Philippines	16.2	1.1	14.7:1
Japan	1.9	1.0	1.9:1
Taiwan	2.1	0.6	3.5:1
Hong Kong	1.3	0.4	3.2:1
America (U.S.)	8.6	2.6	3.3:1
Australia	1.5	1.4	1 :1
Israel	0.9	1.0	0.9:1
France	0.9	0.7	1.2:1
United Kingdom	0.6	0.5	1.2:1
Switzerland	0.6	0.6	1 :1

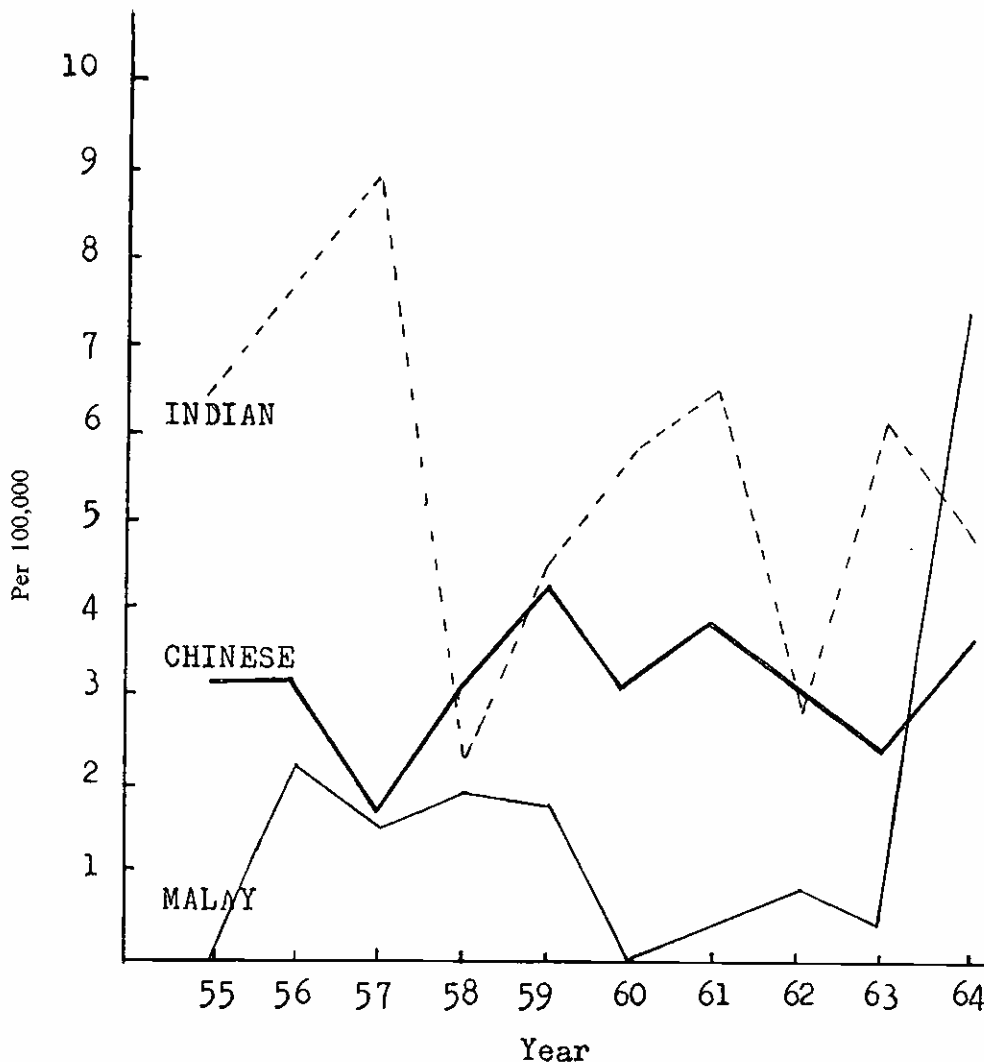


Fig. 2. Homicide rate per 100,000 according to Race.

TABLE V

TOTAL NUMBER OF HOMICIDE CASES BY AGE AND SEX DURING THE TEN-YEAR PERIOD

Age Groups	Male	Female	Total
0 — 4	4	3	7
5 — 9	4	2	6
10 — 14	7	3	10
15 — 19	71	3	74
20 — 24	83	11	94
25 — 29	55	12	67
30 — 34	40	6	46
35 — 39	42	8	50
40 — 44	33	7	40
45 — 49	25	7	32
50 — 54	24	6	30
55 — 59	14	3	17
60 — 64	10	1	11
65 — 69	9	0	9
70+	5	0	5

TABLE VI

HOMICIDE RATE PER 100,000 OF MALE POPULATION ACCORDING TO AGE GROUPS

0 — 9	0.6
10 — 19	2.2
20 — 29	21.4
30 — 39	16.8
40 — 49	13.7
50 — 59	14.2
60 — 69	19.7
70+	8.0

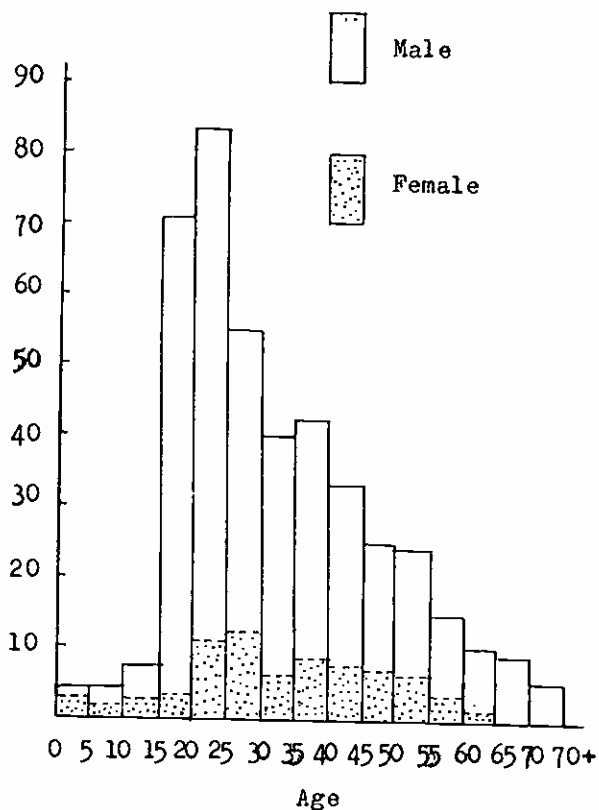


Fig. 3. Total number of Homicide Cases by Age and Sex (1955-1964).

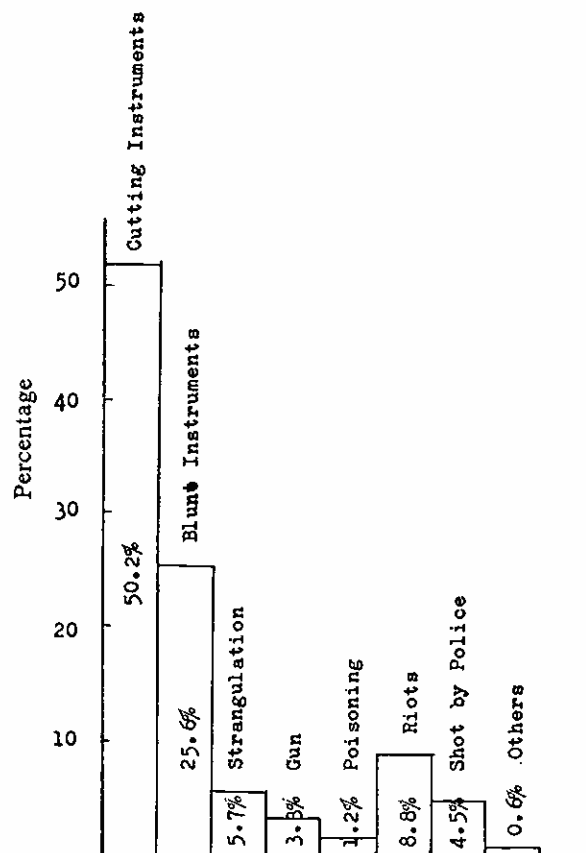


Fig. 4. Total Percentage of Homicide Cases by the various methods, 1955-1964.

more rife, not even during the Chinese 7th moon of the "Hungry Ghosts". There was also no statistical significance in variation when comparing individual months throughout the 10-year period. A more monotonous curve was obtained if we did not include the casualties sustained during the racial riots (Table VII, Fig. 5).

SUMMARY

The homicidal rates were presented, tabulated under various headings of rate, race, age, sex, methods and time of the year.

Singapore was a city of moderate violence comparing with many other countries. Majority

TABLE VII
TOTAL NUMBER OF HOMICIDE CASES IN EACH MONTH FOR THE TEN-YEAR PERIOD

Months	Total Number	Killed in Riots	Total No. Minus Riots
January	36	1	35
February	40	0	40
March	45	1	44
April	35	0	35
May	51	3	48
June	40	0	40
July	60	24	36
August	43	0	43
September	46	7	39
October	42	14	28
November	31	0	31
December	37	0	37

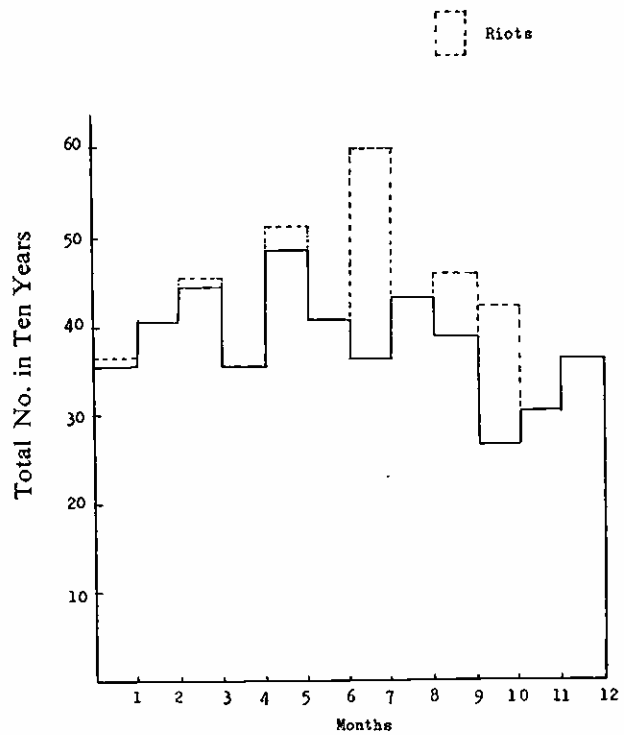


Fig. 5. Total Number of Homicide Cases in each month for the ten-year period.

of the homicides were not of the cold pre-meditated variety. They were more the result of flight of passion and anger, and a high proportion of the cases were end results of gang warfare.

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