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# CRIMINAL STATISTICS: THE VOLUME OF CRIME

Erik Ekelund<sup>1</sup>

In Finland Dr. Veli Verkko has issued a work in the Finnish language<sup>2</sup> which treats of the question of methods which should be used in criminal statistics to determine the volume and trends of real criminality. Already several years have passed since its publication. It cannot, however, have become well known to readers of this Journal nor to American students generally. For this reason, and because the work presents statistical material for almost all the countries in the world, and is the most complete investigation existing of the possibilities of criminal statistics, there is reason for summarizing in this Journal the results arrived at by the author.

Various views have been advanced concerning the capacity of statistics to throw light on criminality. Quetelet admitted that known crimes are but a part of the total criminality, but emphasized that criminal statistics were possible in spite of that fact since the relationship between adjudicated crimes and the total was in his opinion constant even if the relationship between the committed and the discovered offenses varied greatly for different categories of offenses. Characteristic of Quetelet's conception is his well-known reference to "the budget of crime," which year after year is re-

peated with appalling regularity. His deterministic conception appears in the thought of the English historical philosopher Buckle but his best-known pupil was perhaps Adolph Wagner, who advanced ideas inspired by Quetelet in a work with the significant title: *Die Gesetzmässigkeit in den scheinbar willkürlichen menschlichen Handlungen vom Standpunkte der Statistik.*

Quetelet's theories, which were regarded as undermining the belief in the freedom of the will and in moral responsibility, created a great stir and became for a time the subject for violent scientific debates. In accordance with their optimistic or pessimistic view of the possibilities of criminal statistics, the criminal statisticians have split into two factions. Among the "pessimists" we may mention the Austrian scholar Hugo Hoegel, who has insisted that no criminal statistics can give a true picture of real criminality. The relationship between the number of discovered and the number of committed crimes varies both in time and space. In his opinion, no conclusion on the basis of the number of the convicted can be drawn unless consideration is given to the nature of the different crimes, unless the relationship between the number of actual crimes and the detected crimes is constant, and unless

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<sup>2</sup> Verkko, Veli: "Crimes against Life and Assaults, Concerning the Determination of the

Level and Tendencies of These Types of Criminality. Statistical Methodological Investigation. I. Finland and Neighboring Countries. II. Other Countries." Helsinki, 1931.

the penal methods of different countries are identical.

The vexing question concerning the possibilities of criminal statistics has formed the point of departure for the work of Dr. Verkko. He agrees with Hoegel to the extent that he admits that criminal statistics cannot yield data concerning criminality in its totality, either directly or indirectly. The result is that conclusions concerning the trends of criminality as a whole cannot be drawn. Statistical increase may depend simply on an increase in the crimes which are relatively more frequently detected, while the rest of the crimes may perhaps have decreased, with the result that the real conclusion might be that criminality as a whole has declined. The same negative conclusion holds true also for large classes of offenses in which many crimes of different categories have been included. A reliable relationship can be constructed between "legal" delinquency and "real" delinquency only when it is a question of completed willful crimes against life, including willful assault resulting in death but excluding infanticide, since these crimes are of such a nature that the public strongly reacts against them and that only in rare exceptions do they remain undiscovered.<sup>3</sup> The data concerning these crimes can be statistically controlled through mortality statistics. In a comparison which Dr. Verkko has made between the total number of completed willful crimes against life, the number of such crimes followed by prosecution or by conviction, it is shown that the

figures in these three instances develop in a parallel manner when longer time series are used. It would also seem natural that data concerning the persons prosecuted or convicted could form a point of departure for conclusions concerning the actual changes in the number of those committing such crimes. To the group of completed crimes against life here treated belong murder, willful manslaughter, and assaults resulting in death. One wonders if the trends of these separate types of crime can be deduced from the data concerning the number of prosecuted or convicted persons and from the data concerning the number of crimes followed by prosecution or conviction. This question can be answered affirmatively with the reservation that sufficiently long time series should be used if the absolute figures are too small. In those countries where the number of completed crimes against life is high, the tendency for the different crimes mentioned may be observed even if shorter time series are used.

It should be noted, however, that generally speaking criminal statistics do not include only completed crimes but also data concerning incitement to crime, assistance and attempts. Although these offenses, which are much more difficult to detect than completed crimes, cannot be eliminated, there are no great difficulties in the way of securing an understanding regarding the trends of completed crimes. In the case of assaults resulting in death, attempts do not occur, and so far as willful man-

<sup>3</sup> Since murders are relatively more difficult to discover than other crimes against life, the data will be much more reliable if the unplanned

crimes against life, manslaughter and assault resulting in death, dominate in a country.

slaughter is concerned, attempts do not seem to cause any disturbing influence on the statistical series. Only when it is a question of murder will a consolidation of the data of completed crimes with those for incitement, assistance, and attempts result in some variations which are, however, smoothed out if longer time series are employed. If murder and willful manslaughter are consolidated, the resultant figures will in general illustrate the trends of completed crimes even when the figures include data on incitement, assistance and attempts. Often there are included among the persons who have been prosecuted or convicted for willful crimes against life (infanticide excluded), also those who have incited to, have been accessories to, or have attempted such crimes, but the influence of such data on the total series is without moment.

In the number of crimes against life shown by statistics, infanticide or deaths resulting from negligence are frequently included. The statistically observable criminality differs from the real criminality, especially in the case of infanticides. The number of recorded crimes of this nature is, however, usually so small that the real tendencies for the other crimes against life stand out clearly.

This is, briefly, the method that Dr. Verkko suggests for the determination of the real trends of crimes against life within a given country.

Of other crimes, the trend of which can in most cases be illustrated by criminal statistics, may be mentioned assaults resulting in serious bodily injury, robberies and theft. The total

group is so large that local differences in the effectivity of police work are cancelled out. Types of crimes for which statistics cannot give a picture of the real criminality are simple assaults, infanticides, abortion, drunkenness or liquor law violations, adultery, crimes against morals, rape, perjury, fraud, forgery, embezzlement, and criminal bankruptcies as well as offenses against peace and order, violence against an officer, or resisting an officer in the execution of his duties.

The crimes which statistics can throw light upon are then in a minority. The data concerning other crimes are, however, not completely without value. An understanding of the trends of such crimes may be secured if one takes into consideration such circumstances as the public attitude toward the punishable elements in such actions, the local nature of the criminality, and so forth.

The fact that data are gathered from various sources is of importance for the accuracy of statistics. Complementary to the data of courts and prisons it is necessary to secure those of crimes known to the police and of violent deaths reported in the mortality statistics.

If, consequently, the determination of the frequency of crime within a specific country and for certain offenses must be regarded as possible, the question remains whether or not international comparisons may be made among crimes against life and limb. Von Mayr and Augusto Bosco answered this question in the affirmative, Ferdinand Tönnies in the negative. Gaetano Zingalli is of the opinion that international

comparisons are best made when the statistics of a given country are taken as a point of departure and the data from other countries rearranged to harmonize with them. This can, however, not be done because the classifications in existing statistics are not sufficiently detailed or easily modified.

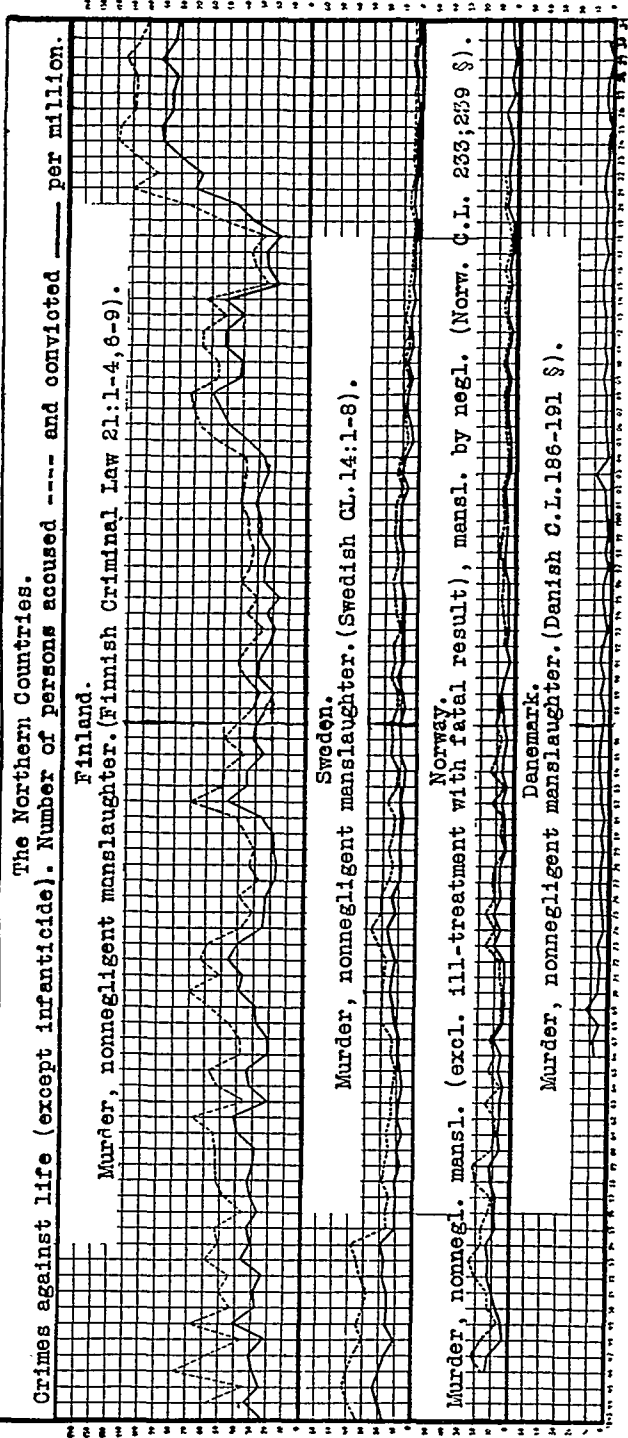
Dr. Verkko is of the opinion that the real criminality in various countries can be compared only in the case of those crimes the trends of which can be carefully observed in the manner already described. The safest foundation for direct international comparisons is the vital statistics of the number of victims of crimes against life and the police statistics of crimes known. Direct comparisons are, however, not possible solely on the basis of data concerning well-established completed crimes. In the statistics of some countries, crimes of negligence and infanticide have been included. These should be properly eliminated before comparisons are made. Since exact data are not always available, it is often necessary in the case of such direct comparisons to classify countries according to the number of crimes against life.

Indirect international comparisons can be based on statistics of detected crimes and on judicial statistics. A given country is used as the point of departure for these comparisons and its statistical material reclassified in accordance with the categories used by other countries. One should, in so far as possible, use long time series so that the effects of temporary deviations are eliminated as much as possible. Finally, it should be observed that the periods

used should, if possible, be the same in all countries studied.

Dr. Verkko presents in his work an extraordinarily large statistical material for different countries. Particularly detailed are the statistics for his own country, Finland. With the permission of the author a diagram is reproduced which exhibits the level of criminality in that country, and for the sake of comparison, corresponding curves for Sweden, Norway, and Denmark have been included. Before the World War, the peak was reached in 1908 in Finland, when the 59.52 criminals per million inhabitants were convicted for crimes against life. During the War criminality declined greatly. The number of persons convicted for crimes against life descended to a level which had rarely been reached up to that time. The state of war in which the country found itself, accompanied by many rigorous regulations, apparently acted as a check on the criminal elements. Another reason may be found in the fact that the liquor restrictions practically made the country dry. The war times, with mined harbors and patrolling warships, were not particularly suitable for smuggling enterprises. After the War the curve began to rise rapidly. The highest point noticed earlier, that of 1908, was reached already in 1920. In 1930, the last year for which we have data although they have not been given in the diagram, the number of persons convicted for crimes against life per million inhabitants had reached 85.90.

The study of this diagram calls attention to the infinitely higher curve for Finland than for Sweden, Norway,



DISTRIBUTION OF CRIMES OF VIOLENCE (EXCEPT INFANTICIDE) IN NORTHERN EUROPE

and Denmark. During the last years the number of persons convicted for crimes against life in Sweden has varied from 2 to 3 per million inhabitants. Norway shows a relatively even, slowly sinking curve during the entire period studied. In Denmark the same crimes are, if anything, even rarer. In comparison with the curves of the Scandinavian countries, the Finnish curve appears like an ever-widening angle, particularly during late years, since these crimes have been increasing in Finland while their number has generally been decreasing in the Scandinavian countries.

At the beginning of the period of the diagram there were convicted in Finland a few more persons per million inhabitants than in Sweden, about three times as many persons as in Norway, and about four times as many as in Denmark. During the 1920's there were from 20 to 40 times as many persons convicted in Finland as there were in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.

The number of victims of crimes against life in Finland has obviously also greatly increased. While the number of persons killed (exclusive of infanticides) was on the average of 28.8 per million inhabitants during 1895-1904, the corresponding figure for 1923-1924 was 87.4; in 1906, 86. The inclusion of infanticides causes but small changes in these figures. There is also an enormous difference between men and women which furthermore shows a growing tendency. In 1895-1904 there were 16 women killed to each 100 men; in 1923-24, there were 7; and in 1926, 9.

We propose to consider briefly the changes in the number of persons who

in Finland have been prosecuted and convicted of murder, willful or unwilling manslaughter, infanticide and homicide by negligence. The number of murders and willful manslaughters show during the period 1895-1906 their first rise, during the troubled years after the general strike of 1905 and the mutiny of Svaborg in 1906. That increase is, however, small in comparison with the increase after the civil war of 1918. As against an average of 14.77 prosecuted and 7.68 convicted per million inhabitants during the period 1895-1904, there were in 1923-24, 48.39 prosecuted and 28.72 convicted; in 1925, 49.34 and 31.47; and in 1926, 41.03 and 25.13 respectively. The tremendous majority of the criminals in question have been men; the increase affects almost entirely the male sex. The result has been that the ratio of men to women has been greatly disturbed. While it was 100 to 32 in 1895-1904, it was 100 to 6 in 1926.

In the official statistics, crimes which are, from the point of view of criminal psychology so different as murder and willful manslaughter have been grouped together. Dr. Verkko has corrected the statistics on this point and has differentiated in particular between the two groups mentioned through the aid of the individual statistical cards which have been prepared by the judicial authorities concerning all those convicted by trial courts for serious crimes. His investigation shows that the trends have been different for murders and willful manslaughters. The number of persons convicted of willful manslaughter has increased much more rapidly than the number convicted of murder.

In 1895-1904 there were on the average 4.86 persons per million inhabitants convicted of murder and 2.12 persons of willful manslaughter, but in 1926, for instance, the corresponding figures were 7.31 and 19.27. During most recent years a decreasing number of persons have been convicted of murder while the number convicted of willful manslaughter has been rising.

A strong increase can also be observed in non-willful manslaughters, even those occurring during brawls. In 1895-1904 there were on the average 32.31 persons per million inhabitants prosecuted and 18.26 persons convicted for such crimes, but for 1923-24 the respective figures were 64.47 and 56.86; and in 1926, 68.29 and 58.58. Among the most important types of manslaughter are brawls resulting in death a type of crime which also shows a great increase during recent periods.

Since the planned crimes, the murders, have in late years decreased while manslaughters show an increase, it is obvious that alcohol has been the prime cause for the great recent increase of violent criminality in Finland. The cause of this is undoubtedly residing in the unfortunate and now rescinded Prohibition Law, which led to an inundation of spirits across the Finnish borders. On the contrary, the temporary prohibition during the war years was effective, due to the exceptional conditions then existing. It is therefore natural that manslaughters, often caused by alcoholic intoxication, should show a decrease during that period while murders, springing from quite other psychological factors, showed a different trend. Characteristic

for the trends of the crimes here treated is the fact that the ratio of women to men has remained quite constant in so far as murders are concerned while great deviation in favor of the women has taken place in the case of manslaughters. During the period 1895-1904 there were 21 women to 100 men; while in 1925 there was but 1 and in 1926 but 3 women to 100 men. It is obvious that the alcoholic consumption does not play as large a role for the women as it does for the men, in so far as such consumption may be regarded as a cause for crime.

As has already been mentioned, infanticide belongs to that category of crimes the tendency of which cannot be observed from the data presented by criminal statistics. It should be mentioned here, however, that since 1895 one cannot observe any great variation in the number of persons who in Finland have been prosecuted or convicted of infanticide. The number of persons prosecuted and convicted for homicide due to negligence has, since the civil war of 1918, been larger than before, owing to the fact that the use of firearms is more general than ever. In studying the figures for the separate years it is interesting to note the high number of prosecutions and convictions during the civil war year.

It would take too much space to give here a resumé of the results arrived at by Dr. Verkko in his treatment of the data from other European countries. Comparing figures for 1922-26 of willful completed crimes against life, exclusive of infanticide, Dr. Verkko found that the group where the number of such crimes is higher than 4 per



100,000 inhabitants includes Finland, the Baltic States, Russia, Poland, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Hungary, Rumania and the Balkan countries; to the group of from 1 to 2 crimes against life belong Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland. Austria and Czechoslovakia; and to the group under 1 crime against life per 100,000 inhabitants, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Great Britain. The gap between countries with great and small criminality was discovered to be particularly great,

since no country fell into the groups from 2 to 3 and from 3 to 4.

We have limited ourselves to this brief review of the author's study of the frequency of crime against life in Europe. He presents also similar data for America, particularly for the United States, but we shall pass them by in this connection since American students have much more recent data concerning their own country than Dr. Verkko had available when he published his masterly work.



*Are present emergency war powers of state executives sufficiently comprehensive to permit speedy mobilization of military and civilian resources of their states?—David Geeting Monroe, Traffic Institute, Northwestern University.*

In a recent survey made by the Council of State Governments, replies received were definitely affirmative. In nearly every state, the governor's emergency power, in addition to complete supervision of state defense councils, covers an exceptionally wide range of subjects. Twenty-seven states have adopted state guard acts and in 26 states the chief executive has been given authority to dispatch the state guard to neighboring states in response to calls for assistance. Indicative of the broad powers conferred is that of New Jersey. The legislature has directed the governor to render the United States in the present crisis any assistance within the power of the state. Toward accomplishment of this objective, the governor may organize and employ any and all resources within the state, whether men, properties or instrumentalities, and is directed to exercise any and all powers convenient or necessary in his judgment to give such assistance.

Specialization of the powers conferred is indicated by the following examples. The governor of Massachusetts is empowered to order air raid protection and blackouts. Colorado's governor is empowered to close highways. That of Florida is authorized to establish priorities on oil, coal and other commodities. A number of state legislatures have empowered the governor to acquire land or other property for military purposes by condemnation, lease or purchase. In at least five states preparation for emergency financial demands resulting from the war have already been advanced. In practically every state, constitutional guarantees give to the governor command of the militia and volunteer forces of the state. So broad are the governor's powers in most states, concludes the Council, that it seems unlikely that states will have to enact the mass of legislation found necessary during the first world war.