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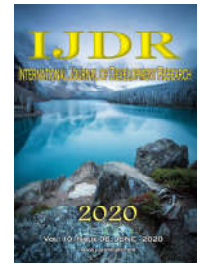
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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HOMICIDE DYNAMICS IN THE CITY OF BELÉM-PARÁ-BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

The issue regarding violence and crime has ceased to be a debate conducted only by public security agencies, being discussed now in academia. In 2016, the Belém-Pará city presented a rate of 77 homicides per 100 thousand inhabitants, and emerges as one of the most violent capitals of Brazil. This study seeks to investigate the dynamics of homicides in Belém and present the profile of the occurrences. The research has a quantitative approach, from secondary data of the homicide crime, in the period from 2017 to 2018. The statistical technique of descriptive analysis was used. Most homicides were found to occur on weekends, at night, and in neighborhoods with large numbers of households in subnormal clusters, that is, where there are problems related to urbanization. The results point to the need for investments in public policies, involving integrated actions directed to the control of criminality.

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INTRODUCTION

There is evidence of increasing mortality due to homicide in Brazil (IPEA, 2019). The country reached the historic mark of over 65,000 homicides in 2017, which is the highest level of intentional violent lethality in the whole country (IPEA, 2019). These numbers become even more worrying because the violence occurs especially among young people. In 2017 alone, more than 35,000 young people were murdered in Brazil, representing a rate of 69.9 homicides per 100,000 young people in the country (IPEA, 2019). Regarding the deaths among young people, the State of Pará presented a rate of 105.3 homicides per group of 100,000 in 2017, ranking 8th among Brazilian states in youth homicides (IPEA, 2019). As for homicides in general, the state has a rate of 54.7 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2017, which is above the national average of 31.6 per 100,000 inhabitants (IPEA, 2019). Brazil beats the record of homicides every year and has shown the highest levels in the last ten years. Another interesting aspect is that the growing number of murders is not homogeneous (IPEA, 2019) – while in the Southeast and Midwest regions

there was a small reduction, in the South the rates remained stable. On the other hand, the North and Northeast regions showed strong increase in the number of homicides (IPEA, 2019). Brazil has a number of homicides by firearm higher than countries that are in open war or armed civil conflict (Waiselfisz, 2015). In 5 years of war in Syria, from 2011 to 2015, more than 250,000 people died, according to an estimate by the United Nations Refugee Agency. In the same period, Brazil registered about 279,000 homicides (Théry, 2018). According to Szabó and Risso (2018), Brazil presents alarming figures on homicide numbers, being first in the ranking of homicides in absolute numbers. "In the last thirty years, more than 1 million Brazilian citizens have been murdered, averaging four homicides per hour" (Szabó; Risso, p. 21, 2018). Mexico and Brazil are the countries with the largest number of cities among the 50 most violent in the world. According to data released in 2019 for 2018 by the Mexican civil organization Safety Justice and Peace, Brazil has 14 cities among the 50 most violent, and Belém occupies the 12th place in the ranking of most violent cities (SJP, 2019). The study of crime and violence, specifically on homicides, is of great importance in order to outline strategies to mitigate their

impacts on society. In order to do so, researchers focus on looking for answers to the unbridled increase in the number of homicides. It is up to researchers to investigate the causes that lead Brazil to have such a high number of murders. In this sense, Szabó and Risso (2018, p. 22) points out some factors that together contribute to this increase in the record of murders:

Homicides have many causes and arise from the accumulation of various risk factors of different natures: from individual aspects – our ability to control aggression, for example – to social and cultural aspects – such as the influence of friends on our behavior –, even the way we socialize, often violently. Risk factors include low education, economic and social inequality, unemployment, demographic dividend, exposure to violence, risky behavior (with alcohol and drug abuse and the use of firearms) and rapid urbanisation. (Szabó; Risso, 2018, p. 22)

Therefore, the homicide rates come from many factors and its study is of great complexity, demanding special care from the researchers that address this issue. Belém is the capital of the state of Pará and has an estimated population of about 1,485,732 inhabitants, according to IBGE (2018). According to IPEA (2018), in 2016 the city registered a homicide rate of 77.0 per 100,000 inhabitants, in addition to violent deaths with undetermined cause. In this sense, the objective of the present study is to investigate the dynamics of the homicides, in order to present the quantitative profile of the occurrences.

MATERIALS E METHODS

In this study, we used the method with quantitative perspective of the data. In the quantitative approach we used descriptive statistics, which according to Bussab and Morettin (2017) is characterized by a set of techniques and procedures, which aims to summarize, organize and present the data in order to facilitate their understanding. The place of research was the city of Belém, the capital of the State of Pará-Brazil, which according to IBGE (2010) has a territorial area of 1,059,458 km², comprising 71 neighborhoods. The five most populous neighborhoods in Belém are Guamá (102,124 inhabitants), Pedreira (69,608 inhabitants), Marambaia (66,708 inhabitants), Tapanã (66,669 inhabitants) and Marco (65,844 inhabitants). Secondary data were obtained from the Deputy Secretariat of Intelligence and Criminal Analysis (SIAC), from the State Secretariat of Public Security and Social Defense of Pará (SEGUP), extracted from the Integrated Public Security System (SISP). We analyzed the 2017-2018 homicide records, and the information collected were year, day of the week, location (neighborhood), and period of the day (shifts).

Literature Review

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as “the use of physical force or power, threatening or in practice, against oneself, another person or a group or community that results or may result in suffering, death, psychological harm, impaired development or deprivation” (Krug *et al.*, 2002, p. 5). In this sense, violence usually results in suffering, psychological harm, or even death of oneself or others. The increasing violence has caused a significant increase in the homicide rate every year (IPEA, 2019). Homicide is defined as a crime in the Brazilian Penal Code of 1940, in Section 121 of

Chapter I, which deals with crimes against life (Brazil, 1940). By legal definition, it constitutes the act of killing someone (Brazil, 1940), which means taking a person's life or murdering a third party, and can be committed by anyone. The crime of homicide is divided into two types, the deliberate or premeditated murder and the unintentional murder. The first occurs when the individual intends to kill another person. On the other hand, in unintentional murder (or involuntary manslaughter), the individual does not intend to kill, but is guided by negligence, imprudence or malpractice (Brazil, 1940). According to the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 (Brazil, 1988), all Brazilians and foreigners residing in the country have the right to life, as all other rights derive from the right to live. Thus, according to Section 5 of the Constitution:

All persons are equal before the law, without any distinction whatsoever, Brazilians and foreigners residing in the country being ensured of inviolability of the right to life, to liberty, to equality, to security and to property, on the following terms: (Brasil, 1988). [Emphasis added].

Thus, the state is responsible for protecting the lives of its citizens. However, every year the number of homicides is growing in Brazil, as shown in the Atlas of Violence (IPEA, 2019). Brazil is a country with glaring inequalities. In a study by Ristum and Bastos (2003, p. 236), where several teachers were interviewed, they were emphatic in stating that “social inequality, caused by an extreme concentration of income, as well as hunger and unemployment, constitute the main causes of violence”.

Brazilian sociology has been intensively analyzing urban poverty over the years. The place where urban poverty accumulates are known as “peripheries”, which are urban spaces typically located at the edges of the metropolitan area and neglected by state policies, where the state presence is either fragile or non-existent (Torres *et al.*, 2003).

In this context, Chagas (2014, p. 3) states that:

We can point out several factors within the urban space that can contribute to the increase of violence, such as social exclusion, poverty and the growth of shanty towns, which are intensely present in peripheral areas, devalued and abandoned by the public authorities, thus making the environment conducive to the diffusion and establishment of violence and crime.

Chagas (2014) also affirms that the territory can be understood as a reflection of several social variables, such as poverty, social inequality and quality of life, and that violence can be pointed out as a result of the relationship between social, cultural, economic, political and moral values, which justifies the territoriality of violence. Peripheralization in large cities constantly produces new territorialities, giving rise to the territoriality of violence and/or crime (Chagas, 2014). Thus, these abandoned areas with no presence of state authorities, where social vulnerability is striking, become areas conducive to crime.

Corroborating this understanding, de Almeida, Chagas and Ramos (2018, p. 12) state that:

In the peripheral areas, where there is a fragile effective presence of the State, from its multiple regulatory

institutions and issuers of state power, the proliferation of violence occurs most clearly, as the diversity of territorial agents in dispute for control of the territory makes zones of tension arise, which often allows the emergence of lethal violence, justified by the need to reach the inherent means of that area of territorial dispute.

Belém concentrates a large amount of subnormal clusters. In these places, there is a shortage of basic public services, and the absence of state actions is easily identified (IBGE, 2010). These territories are areas conducive to the occurrence of crimes due to social and economic vulnerability (Chagas, 2014). Generally, unemployed young people are easily led to commit crimes.

IBGE (2010, p. 19) defines *subnormal clusters* as a:

Set consisting of at least 51 housing units (shacks, houses, etc.), mostly deprived of essential public services, occupying or having occupied, until recent period, land owned by others (public or private) and being arranged usually in a disorderly and dense manner.

Thus, it is observed that these clusters are characterized by the absence of title deeds, and present at least one of the following characteristics: irregularity of areas of circulation and the size and shape of lots and/or shortage of basic public services such as garbage collection, sewage system, water network, electricity and street lighting (IBGE, 2010). This definition is a generic form that encompasses the diversity of irregular settlements such as: shanty towns or *favelas*, shacks, slums, communities, villages, stilt houses, and others (IBGE, 2010). In 2010, Belém housed more than 190,000 households in subnormal clusters, with more than 60,000 located just in the vicinity of the city's central area (IBGE, 2010). It is noteworthy that "the origin of these clusters is linked to the occupation of land subject to periodic tidal flooding, in an area that is not conducive to formal urbanization" (IBGE, 2010, p. 29). The Metropolitan Region of Belém presented the largest proportions of households occupied in subnormal clusters in the country in 2010 (52.4%), followed by the city of Salvador (25.7%) (IBGE, 2010). It is clear that not only economic and social problems contribute to the increase of lethal crimes such as homicide. However, there is no denying that this is a prominent factor and is almost always present in crime studies. In a similar vein, IPEA (2017, p. 33) is emphatic in saying that:

The latest data on lethal violence points to a picture that is not new but deserves to be emphasized: despite the advance in socioeconomic indicators and improved living conditions of the population between 2005 and 2015, we remain an extremely unequal nation, that cannot guarantee life for significant portions of the population, especially the black population (IPEA, 2019). [Emphasis added].

According to Couto (2010, p. 153), "the fragmentation of the sociopolitical scenario of the metropolis, which results in increased social and spatial inequalities, creates favorable conditions for the reproduction of the crime economy." In a consumerist society with great socioeconomic inequalities like that of Brazil, the devaluation of life intensified, to the detriment of goods often superfluous. In this sense, Weyrauch (2011, p. 15) says that:

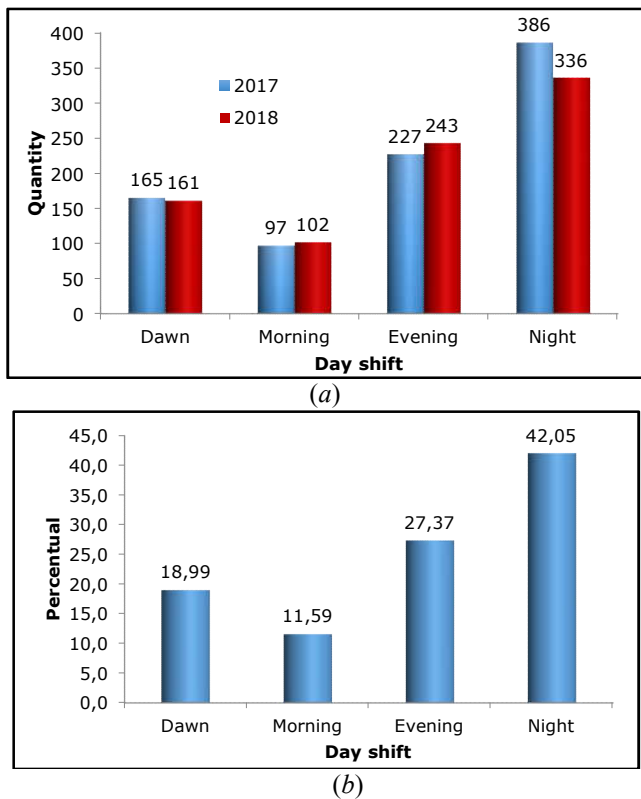
In addition to the violence by deprivation of essential goods is that of superfluous goods, stimulated by the typical propaganda of a consumer-driven society. In this society, the expression "citizenship" is presented at the superficial and external level by the display of products praised by the media. The desire around them masks the real meaning of democracy in the country. One may commit murder over a sneaker, a cell phone or any product that gives the usurper the appearance of a citizen of that society of labels.

Strategies are urgently needed to control, mitigate and reduce these high rates of homicides. According to Silva *et al.* (2016, p. 13) "homicides impose great losses on society and public policies at the municipal, state and federal levels." Thus, the choice of strategies and interventions of the most effective public security institutions, contributing to the prevention and reduction of these rates, positively affects other public policies directed to Brazilian society (Silva *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, studies on violence are growing and seeking to point out causes, consequences and strategies to face this reality. The studies by Batista *et al.* (2016) on homicides in municipalities of the metropolitan area of Brasília pointed to high homicide rates in socially vulnerable territories. Vilaça *et al.* (2016) presented the socioeconomic profile of homicide victims in Belém-Pará, analyzing records of necropsied corpses at the Renato Chaves Scientific Expertise Center. Drumond, Souza and Hang-Costa (2015) conducted a study on homicides in Belo Horizonte, in order to estimate the prevalence and factors associated with positive post-mortem test results for alcohol and illicit drugs in victims from 2000 to 2009. Alves *et al.* (2014) described the epidemiological profile and magnitude of homicides that occurred in Maceió from 2007 to 2012. Sousa e Brasil (2007) studied crime and violence in the periphery of Fortaleza. Silveira Junior *et al.* (2016) described and analyzed the profile of homicide victims in the city of Marabá, State of Pará. Reis (2015) went even further, showing not only homicides, but also the numbers on other violent crimes in the Metropolitan Meso-region of Belém.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

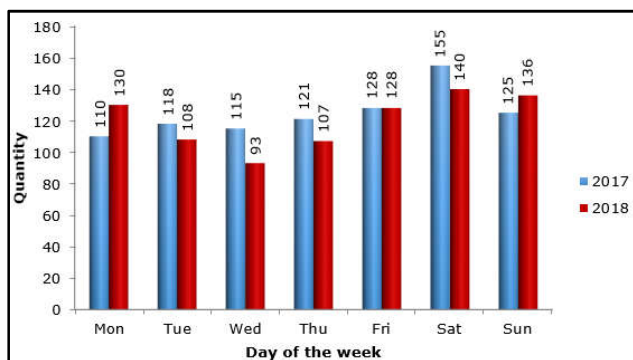
Observing the absolute numbers of homicides in the city of Belém we found that there was a slight downward variation in the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants. According to the data obtained from the Assistant Secretariat for Intelligence and Criminal Analysis - SIAC, 875 homicides were registered in 2017, decreasing to 842 in 2018, making, respectively, a rate of approximately 59 and 57 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. Most homicide crimes in the city of Belém in 2017 and 2018 happened at night (6 p.m. and 12 a.m.). In 2017 there were 386 occurrences compared to 336 records in 2018, making a total of 42.1% of the overall total of the two years analyzed, followed by the afternoon shift with 27.4%, as shown in Figure 1.

It is noteworthy that both in 2017 ($n = 155$) and 2018 ($n = 140$), homicides occurred more frequently on Saturdays ($n = 295$), followed by Sundays ($n = 261$) and Fridays ($n = 256$) (Figure 2). We found that most crimes occurs on weekends, from Friday to Sunday. These findings are in line with studies already presented by other researchers, such as Araújo *et al.* (2008) and Remédios (2016).



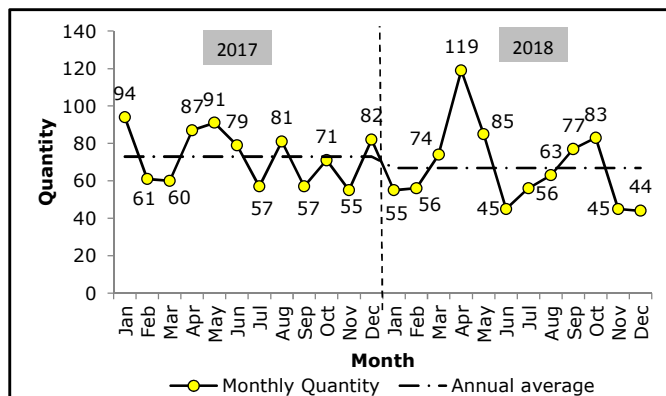
Source: Produced by the authors from the data obtained from SIAC (April, 2018).

Figure 1. Number (a) and percentage (b) of homicides in Belém, in 2017 and 2018, by day period.



Source: Produced by the authors from the data obtained from SIAC (April, 2018).

Figure 2. Number of homicides in Belém in 2017-2018, by day of the week



Source: Produced by the authors from the data obtained from SIAC (April, 2018).

Figure 3. Comparison of homicides registered in the city of Belém in 2017 and 2018, by month of occurrence

Figure 3 shows that the highest numbers of homicides occurred in April ($n = 119$) in 2018, and in January ($n = 94$) and May ($n = 91$) in 2017. Belém had an average of approximately 73 homicides in 2017 and 67 homicides in 2018 (Figure 3). As shown in Table 1, the peripheral neighborhoods of Jurunas, Guamá, and Tapanã are among the those with the highest absolute numbers of homicide in both 2017 and 2018. Two other peripheral neighborhoods appear among those with high numbers of homicides: Cabanagem in 2017, and Benguí in 2018 (Table 1). In addition, the neighborhoods of Pedreira and Marco, which also appear among those with high numbers of homicides, are not peripheral and are populous, according to IBGE (2010) (Table 1). Among the neighborhoods that had the highest absolute number of homicides, 4 (four) registered a reduction, and in 3 (three) of them there was an increase in the number of records, especially the Benguí neighborhood, which had a 57.7% increase in the number of homicides in 2018 compared to the previous year.

Table 1. Quantity, absolute variation and percentage of the seven neighborhoods of Belém that had the highest numbers of homicides in 2017 and 2018

| Neighborhoods | Quantity per Year | | Variation | |
|---------------|-------------------|------|-----------|------------|
| | 2017 | 2018 | Absolute | Percentage |
| Pedreira | 54 | 38 | - 16 | - 29,6 |
| Cabanagem | 43 | 32 | - 11 | - 25,6 |
| Jurunas | 64 | 53 | - 11 | - 17,2 |
| Tapanã | 51 | 49 | - 2 | - 3,9 |
| Guamá | 63 | 67 | + 4 | + 6,3 |
| Marco | 33 | 43 | + 10 | + 30,3 |
| Benguí | 26 | 41 | + 15 | + 57,7 |

Source: Produced by the authors from data obtained from SIAC (April, 2018).

According to IBGE (2010), the neighborhoods of Guamá, Jurunas, Tapanã, Cabanagem and Benguí have a large part of their areas composed of peripheries, with large amount of subnormal clusters. These results are in agreement with the studies by Chagas (2014), who identified the direct influence of territorialities with large peripheral areas as a factor related to the spatial distribution of certain crimes. This study also goes in the direction of the results obtained by Costa and Ramos (2018), who pointed out that the dynamics of homicides occurred mostly in neighborhoods that are in peripheral areas, with higher concentrations of subnormal clusters or near them.

Conclusion

The objective of this work was to investigate the dynamics of homicides, in order to present the profile of such occurrences. In this context, we could identify that homicides occur more frequently on weekends, from 6 p.m. to 12 a.m. The results also pointed out that neighborhoods with large numbers of households in subnormal clusters continue to have high homicide rates. We also observed that segregation in peripheral territories with low presence of public authorities and lacking basic and essential public services such as garbage collection, sewage and street lighting, may lead to the transformation of such territories into areas conducive to crime, since the vulnerability of a large part of the population living in these subnormal clusters facilitates the co-optation of

young people by the local crime. Moreover, we observed that in only 10% of the neighborhoods almost 40% of the homicides occur. Thus, there is a need for greater investments in public policies and education, in improving the living conditions of the poor and workers in peripheral areas, supplying essential public services, and in the expansion of social rights, with occupation and employment for the youth, seeking to reduce the glaring socioeconomic inequalities present in Brazilian cities. These would be actions for the medium and/or long term, in order to achieve more satisfactory results, regarding the reduction of crime and, consequently, the homicide rate. It should not be forgotten that, although the role of public security in Brazil is of great importance, it cannot solve the problem of violence and crime in isolation. Thus, an integrated action is required in the implementation of public policies, both in the socioeconomic and public security areas.

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