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### Some Aspects of Alcohol-related Homicides in Northern Europe

This is not an exhaustive presentation of the links between alcohol and violence in northern Europe. But I am going merely to describe some aspects of that link, and how they have changed in such a short time as the last hundred years.

A fairly large proportion of the global research and data on the topic (alcohol and violent crime) originates from Scandinavia and this is not a coincidence.

**Table 1.** The percentage of homicide offenders and victims influenced by alcohol in some Western countries in the 1990s (sources: Hougen et al. 1999, 294; Kivivuori 1999; Lehti 2002; Rying 2000, 177-178; Statistik om våld; Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik 2004; Dooley 2000, 19; Carcach & Conroy)

Under the influence of alcohol	Finland 2002-05 %	Estonia 1990-96 %	Sweden 1990-98 %	Norway 1985-94 %	Ireland 1992-96 %	Germany 2004 %	Australia 1989-99 %
Offenders	<b>80</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>62</b>	..	39	35	38
Victims (incl. childr.)	<b>74</b>	..	<b>51</b>	<b>52</b>	42	..	33
Crimes							
All drunk	<b>69</b>	..	<b>48</b>	..	31	..	29
Someone drunk	14	..	17	..	24	..	14
All sober	14	..	35	..	45	..	57

Here I have a slide which shows the percentage intoxicated homicide offenders and victims in selected Western countries at the moment.

As can be seen, in Scandinavia and also in the Baltic countries and Russia, the percentage of homicides related to situations where alcohol is consumed as well as the percentage of intoxicated persons involved in these crimes is much higher than in central Europe (presented here by Ireland and Germany) or, for example, in Western industrial countries outside of Europe (presented here by Australia). On the other hand, the percentage is significantly higher in Finland, Estonia and Russia than in Sweden or Norway.

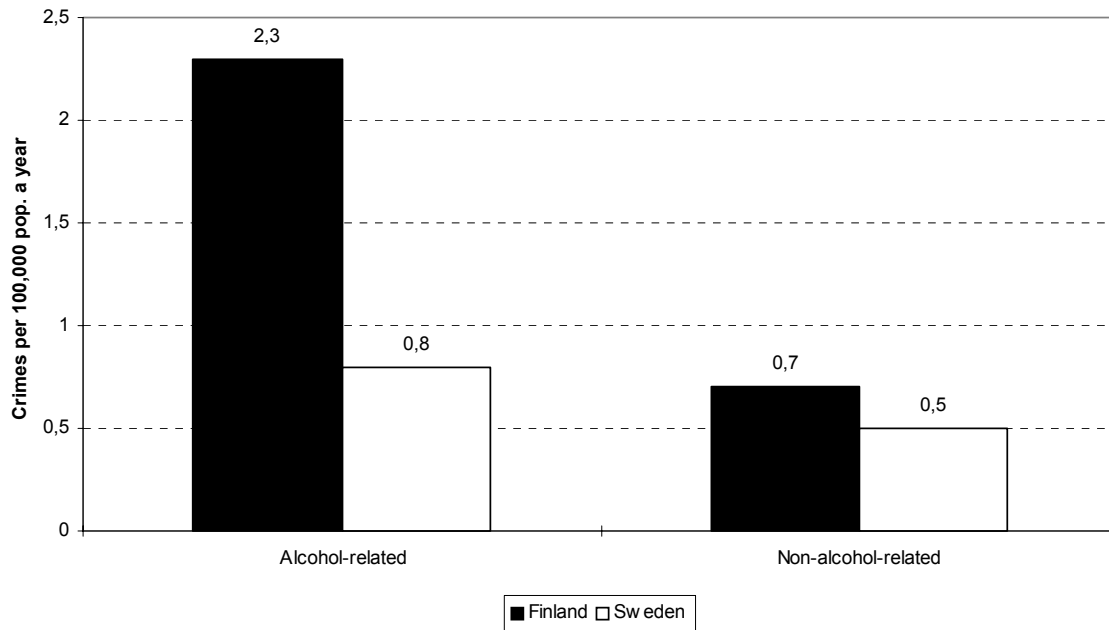


Figure 2. The homicide rates in Finland and Sweden in alcohol-related (some of the parties drunk) and non-alcohol-related (all of the parties sober) homicides (Lehti 2004; Rying 2000)

Actually most of the difference in general homicide rate between Finland and the other Nordic Countries, in Finland the rate is at the moment over double of that than in Sweden or Norway or in western Europe in general, this difference can be explained by the difference in the rate of alcohol-related crimes only (e.g. crimes committed by intoxicated offenders in situations where the persons involved are consuming alcohol together).

On the other hand, Ingeborg Rossow has shown in her studies, the changes in the volume of general alcohol consumption have in fact directed the trends in the volume of homicidal crime in Scandinavia for over 60 years. This is not the case in other parts of western Europe, or at least the link between consumption changes and crime trends is much weaker there.

According to Rossow this difference in the relation between alcohol consumption and violent crime trends is related to differences in drinking cultures between the northern (and northeastern) Europeans and southern and central Europeans. In Scandinavia as well as in the Baltic countries and Russia drinking of alcohol is characterized by a relatively heavy use of spirits instead of beer or wine and by binge drinking instead of consumption in connection with social situations, for example with meals.

But what ever the reasons are, the fact is, that there exists a very clear relation between alcohol consumption and violent crime in northern Europe, which is not shared by other Europeans, or at least the relation is much closer and a much bigger problem in northern Europe than on the continent; and it also explains to a high

degree many of the special features of the Nordic homicides of today: their concentration in private apartments; the low percentage of felony-related violent crimes; the relatively high average age of both offenders and victims.

### Historical trend and differences between sexes

The linkage between alcohol intoxication and aggravated violent behaviour has been fairly stable for men in Scandinavia during the last hundred years at least, the period from which we have comparable and reliable data.

Here is a slide showing the percentage of intoxicated homicide offenders in Finland and Estonia from the early 20th century till today.

Table 3. Percentage of intoxicated offenders out of all offenders in homicides in Finland in 1910–2005 (Lehti 2001; National Research Institute of Legal Policy)

Years	All offenders	Male offenders	Female offenders	Female off. crimes against over 1-year-old victims	N1	N2	N3	
1910-12	72 %	76 %	6 %	14 %	311	293	18	7
1920-29	78 %	79 %	7 %	15 %	1866	1820	46	20
1956-68	63 %	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
1965-69	70 %	72 %	39 %	52 %	402	374	28	21
1970-74	78 %	80 %	33 %	60 %	415	397	18	10
2002-05	80 %	82 %	63 %	73 %	423	380	43	37

(sources: Aho 1976; Kivivuori 1960–1974; Lehti 2001; National Research Institute of Legal Policy)

Table 4. Percentage of intoxicated offenders out of all offenders in homicides in Estonia in 1920–1995 (Lehti 1997)

Years	All offenders	Male offenders	Female offenders	Female off. crimes against over 1-year-old victims
1920-39	58 %	65 %	11 %	12 %
1960-69	61 %	..	..	..
1976-81	75 %	..	..	..
1990-95	73 %	75 %	54 %	54 %

We can see that the percentage of intoxicated male offenders has been about 70 to 80 percent from decade to decade. And intoxication in this case has meant and means usually very deep drunkenness: levels of 2 to 4 per mil alcohol in blood are not only common but more or less the rule in connection with Nordic homicides – (for those using percentages, this is 0.2 to 0.4 per cent blood alcohol content).

For women the situation has changed radically, as the rapid increase in female alcohol consumption in northern Europe after the Second World War has been reflected by a manifold increase in the percentage of intoxicated female offenders.

What is interesting, is that this increase has had practically no effect whatsoever on rate of homicides committed by women, this rate has been very stable (if infanticides are excluded) in all Scandinavian countries since the late 19th century.

And also for men the linkage between intoxication and violent behaviour is more ambiguous than the mere percentages would indicate. The linkage has never existed universally in the whole male population in the Nordic countries, but it has always been restricted to certain specific male groups, these groups have changed during the last century.

### Alcohol and different age groups

First some data about the situation in different male age groups.

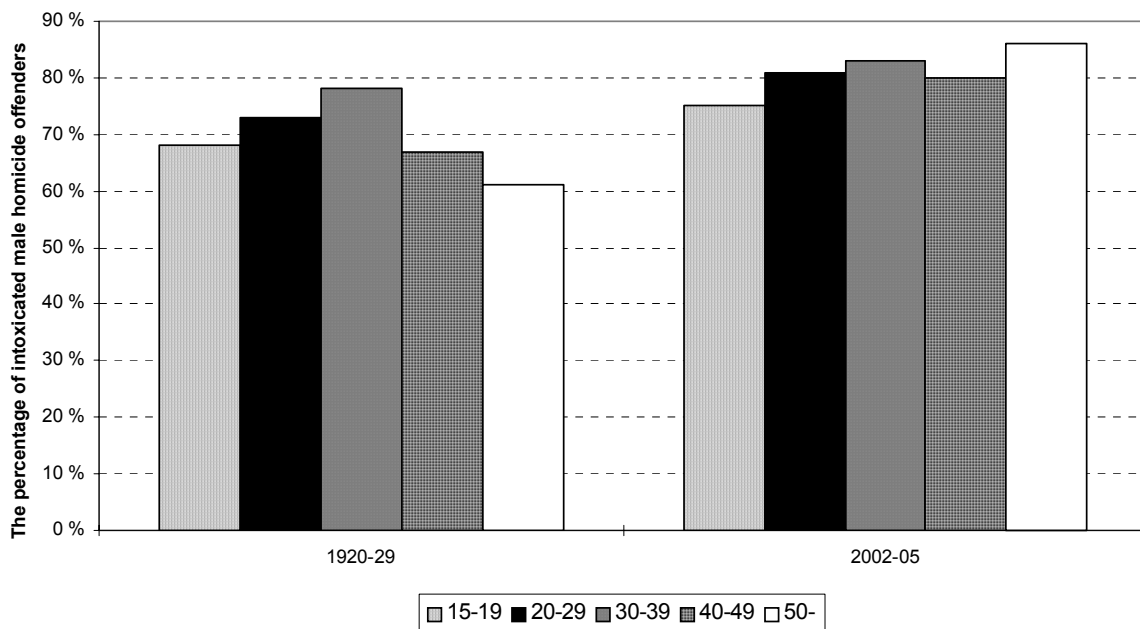
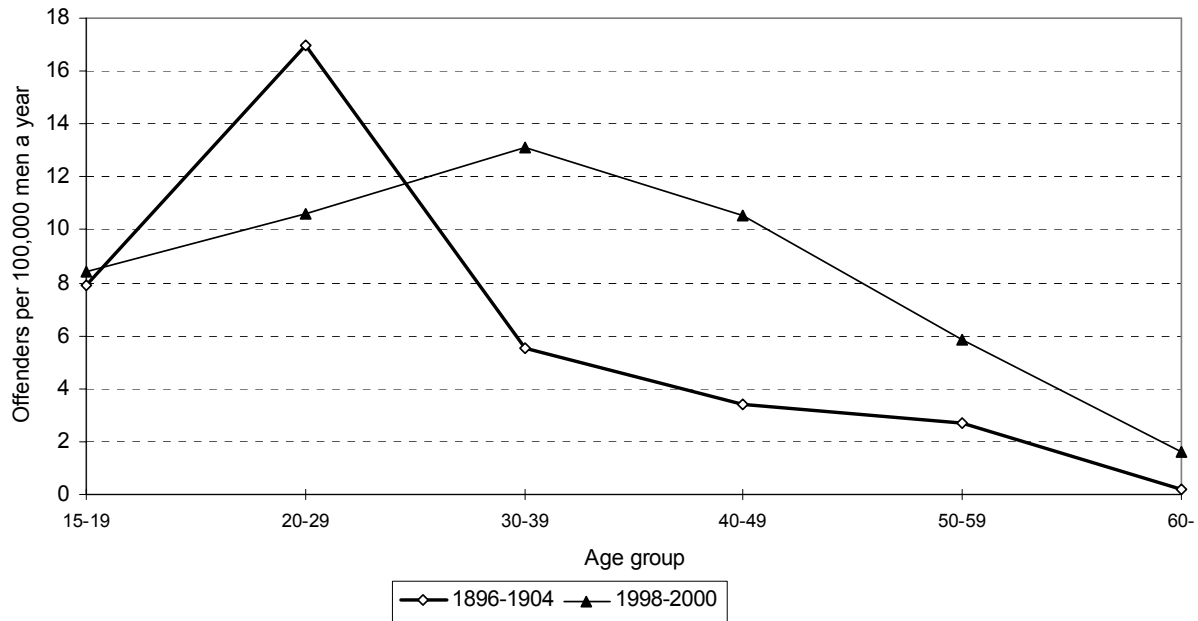


Figure 5. The percentage of intoxicated offenders out of all male homicide offenders in Finland in 1920-29 and 2002-05 by age group (Lehti 2001; National Research Institute of Legal Policy)

Figure 5 shows the situation in Finland in the 1920s and today. As can be seen the percentage of intoxicated offenders as well as alcohol-related crimes is more or less the same in all male age groups, and this has been the case during the whole period from the beginning of the 20th century till today from which data exist.

At the same time, however, the general age structure of homicidal crime has changed radically. From the 18th century till the Second World War, homicides were mainly crimes of juveniles in Scandinavia, while today they are mostly crimes between middle-aged men. In Finland, this change took place in a fairly short period of time after the war in the 1950s. In the other Nordic countries the change began already earlier.



**Figure 6.** Male homicide rate by age-groups in Finland in 1896–1904 and 1998–2000 (sentenced offenders per 100,000 men a year) (source: Statistics Finland; Lehti 2002).

The result is that the homicide rate of 20 to 29-year-old men is today about 40 per cent lower than a hundred years ago, while the current rates of 30 to 40-year-olds are about double of those of the late 19th century.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the linkage between alcohol consumption and violence existed in the pre-Second World War period mainly in the drinking occasions of young adult men, more exactly in their weekend dancing parties and the crimes were accordingly committed usually in public places, dancing halls, streets, speak-easies. Today, although the annual alcohol consumption of young adults in all Scandinavian countries is manifold when compared with that of their age-mates 50 years ago, and although they are as active partygoers as the youngsters of the 1920s or 1930s, the number of their alcohol-related homicides have decreased to a fracture of the earlier and the number of homicides committed in their leisure time activities is today practically non-existent in Scandinavia, even in Finland.

**Table 7.** The location of crime in homicides in Finland in 1790–2003 (%) (sources: Kivivuori 1960–1974; Lehti 2001; Ylikangas 1976; National Research Institute of Legal Policy)

Location	1790-1825	1910-	1920-	1960-	2002-2005
Private lodgings	21.6	34.4	29.3	54.0	70.9
Pub, restaurant	11.0	1.5	1.0	2.1	5.0

<sup>1</sup> The effects of this change have been strengthened by the change in the general age structure of population, because at the same time as the young men have become less violent also their proportion of population has decreased and similarly the increase in the crime rate of middle-aged men has gone hand in hand with an increase of their percentage of population.

Public dances etc.	46.2	25.7	34.4	1.3	0
Street, road	9.3	25.1	28.7	10.9	6.1
Other	11.9	13.3	6.6	31.7	18.0
N	236	331	1971	1256	461

The alcohol-related homicides have moved from streets and dancing halls to private apartments. This is because they have become a behaviour type of middle-aged men. However, not a behaviour type of all middle-aged Scandinavian men, but only of a very special minority.

### **Social composition of homicides**

Because also the social context of alcohol-related homicides has changed considerably during the last 50 to 60 years.

During the last two centuries the general trend in Scandinavia (as I guess in other parts of Europe, too) has been a substantial decrease in the homicide rates of most social groups. This disappearance of the violence of the ordinary citizens took place in Sweden and Norway earlier than in Finland and Estonia, but the trend has been the same. However, for example, in Finland as well as Estonia the crimes of the 19th century and 20th century were still dominated by the so called normal population, young farmers, farm hands and industrial workers.

Since the Second World War the situation has changed, the crime rates of employed population groups have dropped further, while at the same time the crime rates of socially marginalized population groups have remained stable. As a result homicides have become more or less solely a crime type of socially marginalized men. Of all the persons involved in the homicides in Scandinavia, offenders as well as adult victims, about 70 to 80 per cent are at the moment of working age but outside working life, either unemployed or on early-retirement pension, that pension being often alcohol-related.

**Table 8.** The working-life status of homicide offenders (both sexes) in the Nordic countries (sources: Drapsstatistikk 2002; Gottfried et al. 1990, 120; Kivivuori 1999; Lehti 2002; Rying 2000, 176)

	Finland 1998–2000		Finland 2002-05		Norway 1995-2002		Sweden 1990-1998		Copenhagen* 1959-1983	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>Offenders</b>										
Employed	16.7	76	18.9	80	32.2	113	29.3	194	42.3	30
Unemployed	50.5	230	49.2	208	41.0	144	45.8	303	9.9	7
WDA pensioner etc.	15.8	72	15.6	66	12.8	45	13.3	88		
Student	11.9	54	5.0	21	6.0	21	6.6	44		
Old-age pensioner	5.1	23	4.3	18	2.0	7	4.4	29		
Other	..	..	7.1	30	6.0	21	0.6	4	47.9**	34
N	100.0	455	99.9	423	100.0	351	100.0	662		71
Percentage of men	91.0		90.3		90.8		90.0			

\* Non-psychotic male offenders; \*\* Outside labour force

The change can also be demonstrated by the data concerning earlier criminal convictions of the offenders. In Finland in the pre-Second World War period 60 to 70 percent of male homicide offenders did not have any kind of earlier sentences, today 80 percent of them and half of the female offenders have earlier prison sentences.

**Table 9.** The earlier convictions of homicide offenders in Finland in 1910–29 and 1998–2000 (%) (source: Lehti 2001; Lehti 2002)

	Offenders				Adult population (15 y +) 1998–2000	
	1910–12 Male	1920–29 Male	1998–2000		Male	Female
			Male	Female		
No previous offences	72.4	58.9	23.1	50.0	73.0	95.0
Previous violent crimes	12.0	9.0	54.0	36.0	5.0	0.5
Previous other crimes	..	..	75.9	44.0	..	..
N	322	2011	507	50		

1910–1929: previous violent crimes = sentenced earlier at least once for assaults or homicides; previous offences = crimes against Criminal Code: political crimes and offences against the Prohibition Law are excluded.

1998–2000: previous violent crimes = sentenced earlier at least once for assaults or homicides; previous other crimes = sentenced earlier at least once for other Penal Court crimes by a criminal court.

Thus, the linkage of alcohol and violence had 50 years ago a much broader social base in Scandinavia than today. Especially amongst the younger male population. Today the linkage exists practically only amongst unemployed male substance abusers.

**Table 10.** The percentage of abusers of intoxicants among homicide offenders and victims (both sexes) in the Nordic countries in the 1990s (sources: Drapsstatistikk 2002; Gottlieb et al. 1990, 121; Hougen et al. 1999, 294; Kivivuori 1999; Lehti 2002; Rying 2000, 177-178)

	Finland 2002-2005	Sweden 1990-1998	Copenhagen	Oslo 1985-1994
<b>Offenders</b>				
Abuser of alcohol	57%	47%	..	..
Abuser of drugs	29%	26%	..	..
Abuser of A or D	68%	..	65%*	..
<b>Victims</b>				
Abuser of alcohol	58%	41%	25%**	41%
Abuser of drugs	14%	15%	..	..
Abuser of A or D	64%	..	..	..

\* Non-psychotic male offenders in homicides of 1959-1983; \*\* All victims of homicides in 1985-1994

Because the majority of homicide offenders and adult victims in Finland are not only unemployed but they can also be described as alcoholics. The percentage of substance abusers of offenders and victims is about 60 percent in Finland, and 45 to 50 percent in Sweden and Norway, the percentage of problem drinkers is much higher. The data in the table originates from the assessments of criminal investigators. But we also have actual medical diagnoses of alcoholism of the under 21-year-old homicide offenders in Finland, and the picture they show is even darker and indicates that the investigators may be too lenient in their assessments. An average 50 percent of the under 21-year-old offenders are diagnosed as alcoholics, but amongst 19-year-olds the percentage is already nearly 60 percent and amongst 20-year-olds about 70 percent.

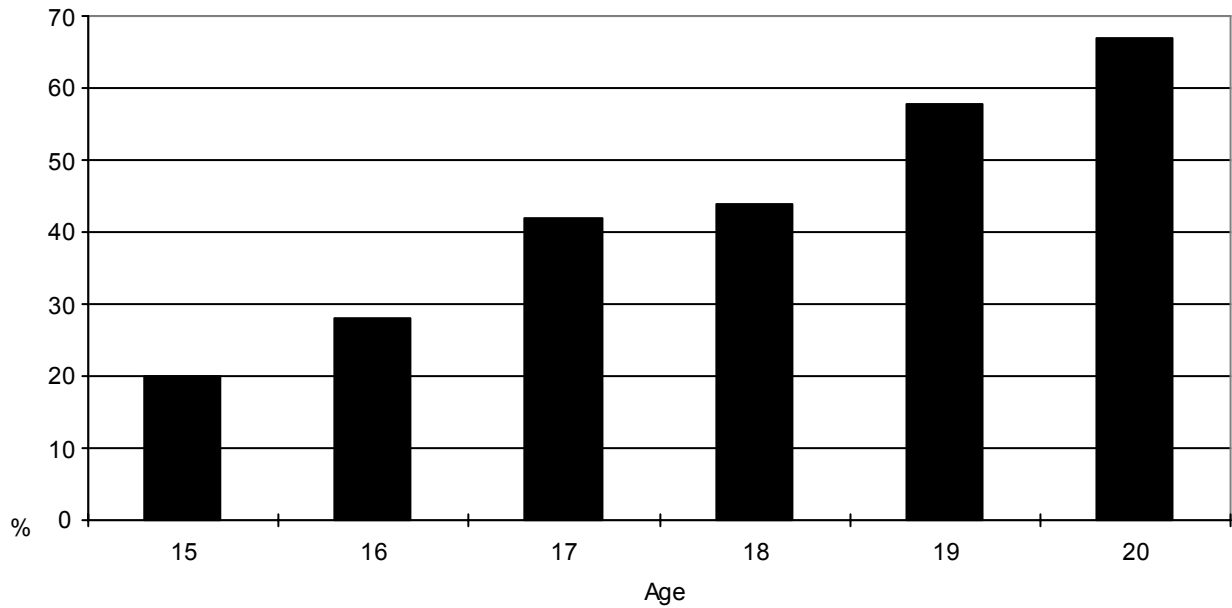


Figure 11. The percentage of under 21-year-old male homicide offenders with alcoholism diagnosis by age in 1980-2003 (National Research Institute of Legal Policy)<sup>2</sup>

Looking at the Finnish data concerning the crimes, at the moment in 70 percent of the homicides at least one of the persons involved is an alcoholic, in about 45 percent all the persons involved are alcoholics.

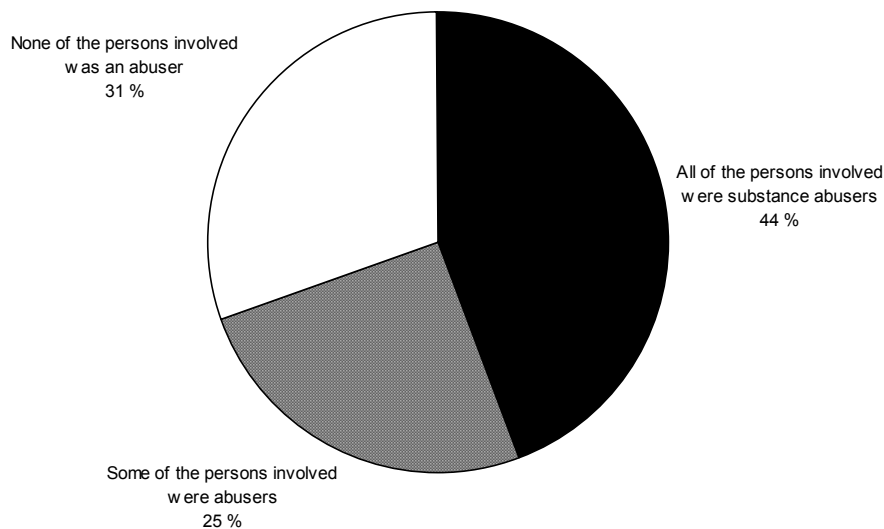


Figure 12. The homicides in Finland in 2002-2005 by the substance abuse status of the persons involved (N=461) (National Research Institute of Legal Policy)

To sum all this up; although the general link between alcohol consumption and homicidal crime has been very stable in Scandinavia during the last hundred years,

<sup>2</sup> N= 15 v: 10; 16 v: 25; 17 v: 38; 18 v: 55; 19 v: 53; 20 v: 57.

that is, if one studies mere percentages of intoxicated male offenders; the substance of this link has changed radically. Violence, at least homicidal violence, has disappeared more or less totally from the drinking occasions of normal population, especially from the drinking occasions of young adult men. This has happened at the same time as the volume of alcohol consumption of the population, also the employed population groups, have increased significantly. For example, in Finland, the annual consumption in pure alcohol per person is today ten-fold of that of the 1920s and 1930s.

However, this disappearance of the alcohol-related homicidal crime of the ordinary citizens has not meant that this type of violence would have disappeared from the Nordic societies altogether; it has merely been concentrated in a small but very violent group of middle-aged unemployed male alcoholics. Which, unfortunately, does not make the problem any less real or important today than it was 50 to 60 years ago when it comprised a much larger part of the population.