

The Social Anatomy of Homicide: Relationships, Situations, and Legal Categories in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Homicide is often treated as a reliable measure of serious violence, but aggregate counts reveal little about the social form of killing. This study examined how victim-offender relationships and immediate situations shaped the interpretation of homicide and how those dimensions related to legal classification in Indonesia. A structured integrative review and socio-legal documentary analysis were conducted using peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2020 to 2026, official BPS crime statistics, and Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code. The review found that intimate partner, family, acquaintance, stranger, and criminal-context homicides represented different social events. Relational history influenced access, exposure, conflict, and control, while arguments, accompanying offences, weapon availability, separation, and location affected lethal escalation. Indonesian criminal law classified killings through legally relevant elements such as intentional killing, specified kinship, offence-connected killing, and premeditation, but these categories did not reproduce the distinctions used in homicide research. Indonesian homicide research would benefit from recording relationship, situation, and legal outcome as separate fields so that social information is not lost in aggregate counts or final legal classifications.



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INTRODUCTION

Homicide attracts unusual confidence in criminological comparison because death is less dependent on reporting behaviour than many non-lethal offences. Police recording, forensic examination, and criminal investigation usually follow a suspicious death, which makes homicide appear more stable than assault, threats, or domestic violence. Van Breen et al. (2023, 2024) nevertheless show that homicide cannot automatically stand in for other forms of violence because different offences do not move together in every place or period. Buil-Gil et al. (2026) add a measurement problem because national figures are partly shaped by counting rules. BPS reported 832 homicide cases in Indonesia for 2022 (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2024a). That number provides a national indication of police-recorded homicide, but it does not reveal whether the deaths occurred between partners, relatives, acquaintances, strangers, or people connected through another offence. BPS crime publications were not designed as event-level homicide registers (BPS, 2024b). The problem begins only when an aggregate count is used to answer questions that depend on the social relationship and circumstances of each case.

Victim-offender relationship is one of the clearest examples (Kadir, 2025, 2026f). Beatty and Butler (2025) show across violent offences that the familiar emphasis on stranger danger can misrepresent where violence actually occurs. Homicide research makes the same point in a more severe form. Walz et al. (2025) found marked differences in relationship, place, and injury patterns between male and female homicide victims, with male victims more often killed by acquaintances or friends and female victims more often killed by intimate partners. Kennedy et al. (2025) likewise found meaningful differences among family, acquaintance, and stranger homicide in older Australian victims. Relationship is therefore not a background demographic field because it changes exposure, access, location, and the kind of interaction that precedes death.

The relationship alone is still not enough. Two people who know one another can reach a lethal event through very different sequences. One killing may follow an acute argument. Another may occur during robbery, drug-market activity, retaliation, or a planned attack. Liu (2025) found that behavioural patterns and weapon use differ across homicide groupings in a study of adjudicated Chinese cases, while Fridel (2025) showed that contextual effects vary across felony, argument, intimate partner, and child-abuse homicide. Broad homicide categories can conceal this variation. A useful classification must retain enough situational detail to distinguish events without pretending that every case belongs neatly to a single motive.

Intimate partner homicide remains important because the literature demonstrates how much is lost when a lethal incident is detached from its history. Rai et al. (2020), Sheed et al. (2024), and Smith et al. (2024) show that stalking, coercive control, separation, prior violence, sexual coercion, jealousy, and threats can precede the death for months or years. Those studies should not become the template for homicide as a whole. They instead show why relational history matters in some homicide types and why other types require different information. Acquaintance and stranger killings may depend more heavily on immediate conflict, place, routine activity, an accompanying offence, weapons, or participation in a criminal setting. The analytical mistake is not studying intimate partner homicide in depth. The mistake is allowing its better-developed evidence base to stand for all homicide.

Indonesia now has another reason to separate social description from legal classification. Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code has been in force since 2 January 2026 (Kadir, 2024, 2026b). Article 458 contains the basic offence of intentionally taking another person's life, gives legal significance to specified close kinship, and regulates killing connected to another criminal offence. Article 459 addresses premeditated killing. Articles 460 and 461 cover narrower forms of killing that rest on particular facts and legal judgments (Republic of Indonesia, 2023). Criminal law must decide whether the required elements are proved. Social research asks a different question about the relationship and circumstances in which the death occurred. The two forms of classification can inform each other, but neither can replace the other.

Indonesian homicide research would gain little from importing a foreign typology as a finished codebook. The more useful task is to identify a small set of variables that repeatedly change interpretation across studies and can later be tested against Indonesian cases. This article examines victim-offender relationship, immediate and prior situational circumstances, and legal classification as separate dimensions. The argument is limited. No prevalence estimate is made for intimate partner, family, acquaintance, stranger, or offence-related homicide in Indonesia because the public data used here do not support such estimates. The objective is to show what an Indonesian case-level homicide dataset would need to preserve if it is expected to support explanation and prevention rather than counting alone.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study used a structured integrative review combined with socio-legal documentary analysis. The integrative approach was appropriate because the evidence on homicide came from heterogeneous designs, including register studies, forensic case series, police-record analyses, typology studies, trend research, and systematic reviews. The literature search covered publications from January 2020 to 2026. Search terms combined *homicide* or *murder* with terms related to victim-offender relationship, intimate partner, family, acquaintance, stranger, situation, typology, weapon, premeditation, classification, and homicide statistics. Articles were included when they were peer reviewed, published between 2020 and 2026, and directly addressed at least one analytical dimension of the study. Studies limited to non-lethal violence or purely clinical case reports were excluded unless they contributed directly to homicide comparison or classification. Thirty-five journal articles met the final criteria and were retained for synthesis.

The selected studies were analysed comparatively according to the distinctions they made between victim-offender relationships, situational circumstances, and homicide classifications. Relationship categories included intimate partners, family members, acquaintances or friends, strangers, criminal associates where identifiable, and unresolved relationships. Situational analysis considered the immediate dispute or activity surrounding the killing, relevant prior behaviour, location, weapon, accompanying offences, and post-event conduct when reported. Motive was treated cautiously because administrative and investigative records may contain inferred rather than directly established

motives. Findings were compared for convergence and disagreement across studies, with greater analytical weight given to patterns reproduced across independent datasets and studies with clearly described case definitions and coding procedures.

The socio-legal component relied on Indonesian documentary sources consisting of BPS national crime statistics and Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code. BPS data were used to establish the national statistical context and the limitations of aggregate homicide records, while Articles 458 and 459 of the Criminal Code were examined as the principal legal categories relevant to intentional and premeditated killing. The international literature was used to identify relational and situational variables rather than to estimate the distribution of homicide types in Indonesia. Such estimates were not possible because no national case-level dataset linking victim-offender relationship, incident circumstances, forensic information, and final legal disposition was available. The resulting analytical framework should therefore be understood as a basis for subsequent empirical testing with Indonesian case-level data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Homicide as a Relational Event

A homicide begins before legal classification and often before the fatal encounter. The victim and offender may share a household, a former relationship, kinship, friendship, neighbourhood contact, work, illicit activity, or no prior contact. Those ties shape access and the places where contact occurs. Hiltz et al. (2020) show more broadly that violent victimisation and offending can overlap within the same social environments. Zimmerman et al. (2021) also demonstrate that characteristics of the victim-offender dyad matter in homicide-suicide research. Intimate partner homicide supplies especially strong evidence because studies often contain detailed relational histories. Rai et al. (2020) identified stalking-related correlates in United States cases, while Sheed et al. (2024) linked stalking, coercive control, and homicide in an Australian population. Overstreet et al. (2021) found that victim, offender, and incident characteristics differentiated lethal from non-lethal intimate partner violence. The recurring point is that the final incident alone can hide information that changes how the killing is understood.

Separation changes the relationship without necessarily ending exposure. Former partners can remain connected through children, residence, digital communication, property, work, or repeated unwanted contact. Sheed et al. (2024) found stalking to be especially prominent in ex-partner homicide cases. Smith et al. (2024) show that sexual coercion can coexist with other forms of intimate partner violence and become part of the history preceding homicide. Johnson (2024) found different patterns of jealousy in homicide-suicide and homicide-only cases. None of those findings means that jealousy or separation independently explains a killing. They show that the label former partner may hide a period in which contact has become more contested and control more unstable. National and typological studies also warn against treating partner homicide as one stable pathway. Matias et al. (2021) found important gendered similarities and differences in Portuguese intimate partner homicide. Vatnar et al. (2022) documented variation across three decades of Norwegian cases. Vignola-Lévesque and Léveillé (2022) identified distinct psychosocial profiles within intimate partner homicide. These findings support a narrower conclusion than a universal risk model. Even within the relationship category that has received the most research, several social routes can end in the same lethal outcome (Kadir, 2026e).

Family homicide is less coherent than the phrase suggests. Truong et al. (2023) found substantial heterogeneity across domestic and family homicide studies, including differences in relationship, offender characteristics, mental health, prior violence, and event circumstances. Kennedy et al. (2025) found that older adult family homicide in Australia differed from non-family homicide in location, victim sex, weapon use, and multiple-fatality events. Macucha and Taunde (2020) also show why domestic homicide must be read within local social and institutional conditions rather than assumed to reproduce patterns from high-income countries. A parent-child killing, sibling killing, and intimate partner killing all occur within a broad domestic sphere, but the social processes behind them may be quite different.

Acquaintance homicide deserves more attention than it receives in an evidence base dominated by domestic violence research. Walz et al. (2025) found that male homicide victims in their forensic sample were most often killed by acquaintances or friends and were more often killed outside the home. Kennedy et al. (2025) also identified acquaintance offenders as a substantial group among older adult homicides. Beatty and Butler (2025), although examining violent crime more broadly, show why

acquaintances should not be collapsed with strangers. Friends, neighbours, co-workers, customers, drinking companions, and criminal associates can share routine access without the long relational history found in many partner homicides. Stranger homicide differs because the absence of a prior tie makes the setting and activity that created contact more important. Unknown relationship should remain separate from stranger. An unidentified offender or incomplete file does not establish that victim and offender had never met. Indonesian coding would need clear rules for overlapping ties because a neighbour can also be a friend and a criminal associate may also have a personal relationship with the victim.

Gender changes the distribution of these relationships without supplying a complete explanation. Dunaiski et al. (2024) estimate a substantial global burden of female intimate partner and family-related homicide. Liem et al. (2024) found female homicide victimisation in Western Europe to be strongly concentrated in particular relational contexts. Fridel and Knapp (2025), however, show that explanations of female homicide offending vary across the victim-offender relationship and cannot be reduced to one familiar narrative. Sex and gender matter partly through the social relations in which violence occurs. The same variables can have different meanings in a partner killing, a family conflict, or an acquaintance homicide.

Article 458 of the Indonesian Criminal Code already makes some relationships legally relevant by allowing an increased punishment when the victim is the offender's mother, father, spouse, or child (Republic of Indonesia, 2023). Social research needs a wider field. Former spouses, dating partners, siblings, other relatives, friends, neighbours, colleagues, criminal associates, acquaintances, and strangers are not interchangeable simply because the same basic homicide provision may apply. Recording those distinctions would not change criminal liability. The benefit is explanatory. Researchers could identify whether trends are concentrated in a particular social relationship instead of treating every police-recorded homicide as the same kind of interpersonal event.

2. Situational Contexts of Homicide

Relationship explains access and prior connection, but the immediate situation determines what the parties were doing when lethal violence occurred. Fridel (2025) found that structural conditions do not operate uniformly across felony, argument, intimate partner, and child-abuse homicide. Liu (2025) reached a related conclusion from case-level behavioural patterns and weapon use in Chinese homicides. Those findings make a simple point. Homicide is an outcome shared by events that may have little else in common.

Arguments are easy to classify too broadly. A dispute can involve status, jealousy, money, insults, family conflict, intoxication, neighbourhood tension, or a disagreement connected to illegal activity. The visible argument may also be only the last episode in a longer relationship. For acquaintance homicide, however, the immediate dispute can carry more explanatory weight than a distant social tie. Recording both fields avoids a false choice between relationship and situation. A friend killed during a sudden fight remains a friend, but the mechanism of escalation may have more in common with another argument homicide than with violence rooted in long-term coercive control. Situational coding should therefore describe the immediate process without assuming that the final verbal exchange caused the death. A short confrontation can sit on top of older grievances, repeated encounters, or a criminal dispute. Case records should permit that history to be noted without turning every disagreement into a separate typology. The aim is to distinguish recurring event structures, not to give a unique label to every homicide.

Offence-connected homicide illustrates the difference even more clearly. A victim may be killed during robbery, burglary, sexual offending, drug activity, or an attempt to avoid capture. Those events are social encounters organised by another activity, not merely homicides with an additional charge. Article 458 paragraph 3 recognises this legally when killing is connected to another criminal offence for specified purposes (Republic of Indonesia, 2023). Criminological coding should still record the underlying situation because the same legal provision can include different forms of contact, planning, victim selection, and offender-victim relationship. Liu (2025) shows how behavioural and weapon patterns can help separate homicide groupings that would otherwise be merged by the final outcome. The distinction is particularly useful when victim and offender already know each other. An offence against property can occur between acquaintances, and retaliation within a criminal setting can

involve people with longstanding social ties. Relationship and situation are therefore partly independent fields. Their combination is more informative than either one used alone.

Weapons alter the probability that a violent situation ends in death. Stansfield et al. (2021) found an association between firearm availability and intimate partner firearm homicide in United States cities. Krüsselmann et al. (2023) found patterned differences between firearm and non-firearm homicide across five European countries. Indonesian weapon environments are different, so those effect estimates should not be carried across jurisdictions. The methodological lesson is narrower. Weapon type belongs in the event record because lethality depends partly on the means available during conflict. Knife use, firearms, blunt force, bodily force, and other mechanisms may cluster with different relationships and places.

Forensic information can make those differences visible. Walz et al. (2025) found gendered differences in location, injury mechanism, and victim-offender relationship across 106 homicide fatalities. Tripi et al. (2026) also emphasise weapon choice and injury patterns in a cross-cultural review of intimate partner femicide. Forensic findings should not be treated as direct evidence of motive. Multiple injuries, strangulation, or a particular weapon can acquire meaning only when read with the scene and the relationship. Their value lies in connecting what happened to the body with what is known about the event.

Homicide-suicide also resists a single explanation. Cavlak et al. (2023) documented patterns across two decades of intimate partner femicide-suicide in Türkiye. Johnson (2024) found jealousy to be associated differently with intimate partner homicide-suicide and homicide-only cases. Zimmerman et al. (2021) showed that characteristics of the victim-offender dyad are relevant to perpetrator suicide after homicide. Post-event conduct therefore belongs to situational description when the research question concerns homicide patterns. Suicide after the killing may mark a different event sequence from flight, concealment, surrender, or continuation of violence against additional victims.

Changes in routine life can expose the same point at population level. Abreu Minero and Nivette (2026) found changes in domestic homicide patterns during lockdown in England and Wales. Suonpää et al. (2024) found that homicide declines across European countries were not identical across homicide types. Aggregate stability can therefore conceal movement in opposite directions underneath the national rate. Indonesian trend analysis would be more informative if a rise or decline could be traced to particular relationships and situations. An unchanged total may contain important changes in domestic, argument-related, offence-connected, or stranger homicide.

3. Social Description and Legal Classification

Criminal law narrows a complex event into facts that matter for liability. That narrowing is necessary. Article 458 paragraph 1 defines the basic offence of intentionally taking another person's life. Paragraph 2 gives specified kinship legal significance, while paragraph 3 addresses killing linked to another criminal offence under the circumstances stated in the provision. Article 459 separately regulates premeditated killing (Republic of Indonesia, 2023). A court does not need a complete sociological account before deciding whether those elements are proved. The legal question and the social question overlap only where the law makes the same fact relevant. Social description can remain wider because its purpose is to explain variation rather than determine guilt.

Premeditation shows why the distinction matters. Social researchers can identify planning behaviour, weapon acquisition, surveillance, prior threats, travel, or efforts to create an opportunity. Legal premeditation remains a normative conclusion that depends on the applicable law and the evidence accepted in the case. Ploeg et al. (2026) found behavioural differences associated with murder and manslaughter classifications in research on premeditation, but behavioural patterns cannot be converted mechanically into a legal finding. A homicide can have a long conflict history without meeting a legal test for premeditation. Another can be legally premeditated even when researchers know little about the deeper relationship between the parties. Behavioural research can assist legal analysis by identifying facts worth examining, but the direction of reasoning matters. The presence of planning-related behaviour may support an investigation into premeditation, while the legal conclusion must still be reached through the statutory test and admissible evidence. Criminological categories remain descriptive or explanatory even when they use facts that later become legally significant.

Risk classification creates another boundary. Garcia-Vergara, Almeda, Martín Ríos, et al. (2022) synthesised factors associated with intimate partner femicide. Graham et al. (2022) found several

explanatory traditions in the intimate partner homicide literature rather than one settled causal theory. Pineda et al. (2023) identified different victimisation profiles among women exposed to intimate partner violence and homicide. Those classifications are designed to understand variation or identify risk. They are not standards of criminal proof. A factor can be useful for prevention and still be irrelevant to an offence element.

Statistical classification has its own rules. Buil-Gil et al. (2026) demonstrate that cross-national homicide comparisons change when counting rules differ. Kivivuori et al. (2024) describe the value of the European Homicide Monitor in creating common variables across legal and statistical systems. Van Breen et al. (2023, 2024) show a similar need for caution when homicide is used as an indicator of wider violence. An incident count, victim count, recorded offence, suspect record, and final conviction are not the same unit. Good homicide research states which one is being measured.

BPS provides an essential national count, but the 832 homicide cases reported for 2022 should not be mistaken for a case-level research dataset (BPS, 2024a). A research file would need additional fields on relationship, immediate circumstances, place, weapon, other offences, prior relevant violence where documented, post-event conduct, and legal disposition (Kadir, 2026c). Unknown values should remain visible because uncertainty is itself information about data quality. Such a dataset could later show whether particular social configurations are more often associated with certain legal outcomes. No such association can be inferred from the aggregate figure used in this article.

Articles 460 and 461 reinforce the point that legal categories can be narrower than broad social homicide classifications. Article 460 deals with a mother taking the life of her child at or shortly after birth under the circumstances specified by the statute, including a different penalty when the act is planned. Article 461 concerns taking another person's life at that person's clearly and seriously expressed request (Republic of Indonesia, 2023). Those provisions are legally important, but the present review does not contain enough recent empirical work on those specific forms of killing to build a reliable social comparison. The article therefore does not force them into a framework derived mainly from interpersonal homicide research.

4. A Framework for Indonesian Homicide Research

An Indonesian homicide research file should keep relationship, situation, and legal outcome separate. Relationship coding can begin with categories that are usually recoverable from investigative records. Current and former intimate partners should not be merged. Family relationships should be specified where possible. Acquaintance or friend should remain separate from stranger, while criminal associates can be coded when the record supports that description. Unknown relationship needs its own category. Kivivuori et al. (2024) and Kennedy et al. (2025) show why careful treatment of relationship produces information lost in a simple known versus stranger split. The coding manual should also explain overlapping relationships so that a former partner who is also a co-parent remains relationally identifiable without losing relevant secondary context.

Situational coding should be equally restrained. The aim is not to guess a single motive for every death. Case files can more safely identify an acute argument, another offence, domestic control or separation conflict, criminal-context dispute, sexual violence context, child or family abuse, or an unclear situation when evidence is insufficient. Place and weapon can be recorded separately instead of being built into the category itself. Fridel (2025) and Liu (2025) both support this caution because homicide groupings can differ in context and behaviour even when they share a legal outcome. Categories should remain revisable after pilot coding of Indonesian cases.

Legal outcome then sits beside those fields. The recorded article at the start of an investigation should not automatically be treated as the final legal classification because charges and findings can change as evidence develops. A stronger dataset would preserve the initial suspected offence, the prosecution position where available, and the final adjudicative outcome. That design would permit later socio-legal questions without asking researchers to decide criminal liability themselves. Ploeg et al. (2026) show why behavioural evidence and legal distinctions around premeditation can be compared empirically without collapsing one into the other.

The usefulness of this separation becomes clear in ordinary cases. A spouse killed during prolonged control and a spouse killed during an offence unrelated to a domestic dispute may both involve the kinship provision in Article 458 paragraph 2. Their preventive implications are not the same. Two acquaintance homicides may both be prosecuted under the basic intentional killing provision even

though one arose from a sudden argument and the other followed planned retaliation (Kadir, 2026d, 2026a; Kadir & Mappaselleng, 2025). A stranger killed during robbery may be socially distant from the offender but legally linked to the other offence under Article 458 paragraph 3. Legal similarity and social similarity do not always occur together.

Prevention depends on those differences. Rai et al. (2020), Sheed et al. (2024), and Smith et al. (2024) repeatedly identify patterns involving stalking, separation, coercive control, sexual coercion, and prior violence in the intimate partner literature. Family homicide has a wider range of configurations, as Truong et al. (2023) demonstrate. Acquaintance and stranger homicide may require more attention to immediate disputes, public settings, illicit activity, routine contact, and weapon availability. No single prevention programme can address all of those situations simply because the final outcome is homicide.

Structural explanations become more credible after homicide is disaggregated. Cho et al. (2021) found that neighbourhood processes shape pathways to homicide in ways that are more complex than a direct poverty explanation. Fridel (2025) found contextual effects to vary by homicide type. Liem et al. (2024) and Dunaiski et al. (2024) show strong relational concentration in female homicide victimisation, while Fridel and Knapp (2025) show that offender motivations vary across relationship categories. A national analysis that ignores type can make a condition appear universally related to homicide even when the association is concentrated in one group of cases. Indonesian testing should begin with a retrospective pilot using police, forensic, and court records from a defined jurisdiction and period. The coding manual should explain how conflicting records are resolved and when a variable remains unknown. A second coder should review a subset of cases before expansion because relationship is usually easier to classify than situation or motive. Disagreement would expose categories that sound clear in theory but fail when applied to incomplete case material.

A national homicide count would remain useful after such a system exists. The additional data would answer different questions. BPS could continue to provide national statistical visibility, while case-level research could examine whether changes are concentrated in a particular relationship, situation, place, or weapon pattern. Suonpää et al. (2024) show why type-specific trends matter, and van Breen et al. (2023, 2024) show why homicide should not be treated as a universal proxy for other violence. More detailed recording would not make every homicide fully explainable. Better recording would simply prevent information already present in case records from disappearing behind one aggregate category.

CONCLUSION

Homicide cannot be understood adequately from the death count or legal article alone. Recent research shows consistent differences across intimate partner, family, acquaintance, and stranger relationships, while situational features such as argument, another offence, weapon availability, place, and prior patterns of control change the meaning of the lethal event. The evidence is strongest for intimate partner homicide, but broader studies on acquaintance, stranger, forensic, and behavioural patterns show that those findings should not be generalised to all killings. For Indonesia, Law No. 1 of 2023 supplies the legal categories needed for adjudication, especially intentional killing under Article 458 and premeditated killing under Article 459. Those provisions do not need to reproduce a criminological typology. BPS likewise provides an essential national statistical function without serving as an event-level homicide monitor. Research becomes stronger when those purposes are kept distinct. Relationship, situation, and legal outcome can be recorded beside one another and compared later without assuming that one field explains the others.

The present study cannot determine how Indonesian homicide is distributed across those social categories because national case-level data were not available. A retrospective pilot using linked police, forensic, and adjudicative records is the next defensible step. Such work would allow the proposed variables to be tested against Indonesian cases, reveal which categories are poorly defined, and show whether the distinctions found in international research hold under local conditions. The immediate contribution is narrower. Indonesian homicide research needs to preserve the social relationship and circumstances of the killing before those details are reduced to a national count or final legal classification. The framework should be changed if Indonesian cases show that other distinctions are more useful, since the proposed categories are a starting design rather than a claim about the final structure of homicide in the country.

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