

Comparative Criminology: *HOMICIDE RATES*

Ranking Countries by Rate of Prison Population and Homicide Rates

This box continues the book's theme of comparing the United States with foreign nations in terms of various aspects of criminology and criminal justice (see Comparative Criminology 1.1 in Chapter 1, which provides an introduction to this feature). In this section, we will examine the findings and conclusions from the eighth United Nations Crime Survey,⁴⁶ specifically the portion dealing with rates of incarceration compared with rates of homicide in 89 countries. This comparison provides a recent analysis of the extent to which more severe sentences (as indicated by rate of incarceration) correlate with homicide rates in various countries. Readers should note that although most of the inmates in these countries were not convicted of

murder, it is assumed that the countries that incarcerate the most offenders are also the most likely to be punitive in terms of a serious offense such as murder—an assumption supported by empirical research.

According to the research findings from the eighth United Nations Crime Survey, the trend is that the higher the ranking of countries in terms of prison population, the higher the homicide rates (see Figure 3.5). As can be seen in the figure, a higher prison population in a given country is strongly and positively associated with the homicide rate in that country. The estimated correlation for this association was significant, and the estimated coefficient was strong to moderate ($r = 0.48$). To clarify, the rate of incarceration is positively correlated with the occurrence of murder in most of the reporting countries,

FIGURE 3.5

Ranking of Countries on Prison Population per 100,000 Population and on Homicide Rates per 100,000 Population



Sources: www.unodc.org; 8th UN Crime Survey; World Prison Population List (Seventh Edition), King's College, London, UK, 2007.