



I21 Psychopathology and Weapon Choice: A Study of 103 Perpetrators of Homicide or Attempted Homicide

Giuseppe Troccoli, MD, Sezione di Criminologia e Psichiatria Forense - University of Bari, Italy, Largo Giordano Bruno, 65, Bari, Italy 70121, Italy; Roberto Catanesi, MD, and Chiara Candelli, MD, Sezione di Criminologia - University of Bari, Italy, Policlinico - Piazza Giulio Cesare, Bari, Italy 70124, Italy*

The goal of this study is to identify some correlations between factors associated to the crime scene (choice of weapon, place, time, and so on), and the mental status of a perpetrator at the time of the crime. The analysis of over a hundred perpetrators and crime scenes, with a specific focus on the choice of weapon, motivation and psychiatric disorders at the time of the crime, have revealed some relevant trends and correlations that could suggest a close interaction between these issues, sometimes with an identifiable and recurrent pattern of findings.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating a broad application of the results of the study in various fields including psychiatry, psychology, criminology, and others. This study will hopefully stimulate further research in this area.

The study evaluated 103 perpetrators of homicide or attempted homicide at the request of either the courts or prosecutors, when a mental disorder was suspected. As a result, these cases do not reflect homicides associated with criminal activity.

The aim of this study was to ascertain a relationship between weapon choice and psychopathology, as well as a correlation to the degree of acquaintance between perpetrators and victims.

The perpetrators were evaluated at the Department of Criminology and Forensic Psychiatry of the University of Bari in southern Italy. Psychiatric examination and Psycho-diagnostic tests were administered for each of the perpetrators. A data base was subsequently formulated, which included information pertaining to age, sex, prior convictions, psychiatric history, substance abuse, crime location, time which crime occurred, weapon used, number of hits, sites, and types of lesion, as well as behavior at the time of the crime. The data base also included information pertaining to behavior before and after the crime, psychopathological disorders, precipitating factors, and information about the victim and the victim's relationship with the perpetrator.

The results showed a prevalence of male perpetrators (about 85%) with a mean age primarily in the adult and elder range, while women tended to be young adults (age: 18-24). Substance abuse was present in 16.6% of all cases, with alcohol being the most commonly used substance at the time of the crime (72.2% of all substances).

In the majority of cases, the crime scene was a house or an apartment, usually belonging to either the perpetrator or victim. In addition, the perpetrator and victim were usually acquaintances. The victim was in the most of cases an acquaintance (29%), followed by husband/wife or co-habiting partner (18.2%), children (13.2%), stranger (12.3%), other relative (11.5%), father/mother (10%), friend (3.3%), non co-habiting partner (2.5%).

The most frequently identified psychiatric disorders at the time of the crime were equally distributed between psychotic disorders (23.3%) and personality disorders (23.3%). In both of these categories, the trend of weapon use was almost identical, where knives were most often used, followed by a variety of other weapons. In cases where a personality disorder was diagnosed (23.3%), it was mostly that of cluster B (16.5%). No cases involving cluster C were identified.

In cases of delusional disorders (11.6%), which was the other most common psychiatric condition seen in this study, knives were the weapon of choice, followed by firearms. No other types of weapon were used in this category.

Other psychiatric conditions were those related to Mental Retardation (8.7%).

In 7.8% of cases no psychiatric pathology was identified, and in the same percentage of cases the condition identified was an impulsive reaction.

When depression was present in the perpetrator (6.8%), the crime scenes tended to be "cleaner," because mostly suffocation, poisoning, or precipitation was involved. In these cases the perpetrators tended to be young mothers who killed their children at a very young age, and it was rare that a traditional weapon was used.

The other conditions, which have emerged from this study, were of the organic type (5.8%), substance abuse (2.9%), and bipolar disorders (2%).

With regard to the apparent motivation, delusional persecution was most common (27.2%), followed by impulsive reaction (21.3%), no apparent motivation (15.5%), jealousy (13.5%) and other less frequent categories. When the crime was motivated by jealousy, a knife or a firearm was most often



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used. In these cases, when pathological (2.9%) or delusional jealousy (4.8%) was present, the outcome of the aggression was either murder or attempted murder, whereas in cases where the jealousy was not of a pathological or delusional nature (5.8), the outcome was exclusively murder.

With respect to non-conventional weapons, which were rarely used, stones were most used in cases where no psychiatric condition was identified, always resulting in homicide. Other non-conventional weapons included poison and fire. At times a car was used as a weapon, motivated by delusional persecution. The least used weapon was a hammer, or a cane.

Weapon Choice, Homicide, Psychopathology