



D53 Forensic Analysis of the Mechanisms of Death Used in Homicides Against Women by Their Partner or Ex-Partner (Femicides) Committed in Spain From 1997–2009

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be introduced to the concept of Violence Against Women (VAW), a moral violence used by men against women, and how to identify the symptoms and develop strategies to prevent these kind of attacks.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by raising awareness to common features to help identify cases of violence against women and evaluate them properly and to learn from the results to analyze risk factors and provide remedies for prevention.

Learning Objectives: Violence is usually approached in terms of results. Most of the studies try to establish differences among the distinct types of violence considering the injuries, circumstances around the aggression or the procedures used to commit the attack, but it is not enough to know the real differences among them and how forensic evaluation can help to prevent new aggression.

Violence Against Women (VAW) has different features when compared to other forms of violence. It is a “moral violence” used by men against women, especially in the context of a relationship, and that is constructed under cultural references. It means that there is a part of this violence that is considered “normal” and this feature affects the evolution of this violence, usually increasing the risk of new and more serious aggression and, even, homicide. These features must be known for the forensic exam (to evaluate and to identify and diagnose this type of violence) and to develop strategies to prevent these new possible attacks.

Hypothesis: Motivation and objectives of VAW murderers are different to other types of violence. These differences had to be present in the mechanisms and procedures used to commit the murder, and they have to give us some reference about the element (cognitive and emotional) involved in the crime.

Brief Synopsis of the Content and Summary of the Results: The Judicial Sentences from Spanish Courts and analyzed the different *modus operandi* used over these last years (1997 to 2009, the last year with available data) was studied. This information is based on the forensic report of the autopsy, and the study has focused around the following indicators:

- Mechanism and instrument used.
- To use a simple mechanism and instrument or more than one (simple or mixed aggression).
- Direct use of hands to kill.
- Degree of violence used during the process of murdering.
- Time of the day when the homicide was committed.

Using these indicators we got different significant conclusions for forensic science and other disciplines related to the assistance, evaluation, and analysis of Gender Based Violence:

- There is not a constant either common pattern in the mechanism of death used by men to kill their partner or ex-partner (women).
- The most common *modus operandi* is stabbing (in Spain there are many legal limits to access to firearms).
- Depending on the degree of violence, there exist two main groups related to the degree of violence used to commit the homicide: one is related with the number of stabs (stabbing mechanism) and hits (battering mechanism) used, and the other one is related to the use of the hands as a direct instrument to kill (mainly strangulation and suffocation). The analysis shows how the degree has evolved in time, increasing the level of violence during the last years.
- The most violent homicides usually are committed at night. This data suggests that the homicide in VAW is part of an accumulative process that starts before the circumstances that are finished in the murder

The results show that there are elements used in homicides of women within a couple's relationship that can help to identify this specific kind of violence, and that can be used to address and focus the investigation in this direction. This last possibility is very important if it is considered that in often many countries, and sometimes in all countries, these deaths (murders) are presented like suicides or accidents.



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The results also give references to identify risk factors related to these murders, and provide some keys to develop strategies of prevention to stop the evolution of violence and the result of murder within relationships with Violence Against Women (VAW).

Statement of the Impact: Most of VAW cases happen within domestic atmosphere without witnesses, and many times it is difficult to investigate the circumstances related to the crime. Knowing some common features can help to identify these cases and to evaluate them properly.

VAW, Homicide, Domestic Violence