



G120 Family Mass Murder: A Cluster of Four Cases in Apulia, Italy, and a Review of the Literature

Maria Carolina Romanelli, MD, Piazza Giulio Cesare, 11, Bari 70122, ITALY; Ignazio Grattagliano, MD, University of Bari, Piazza Cagnola, 3/B, Casamassima, Bari 70010, ITALY; Vito Romano, MD, Acquaviva delle Fonti, Acquaviva delle Fonti, Bari 70100, ITALY; and Giancarlo Di Vella, MD, PhD, University of Bari, DIMIMP, Sezione di Medicina Legale, Policlinico, piazza G. Cesare, Bari 70121, ITALY*

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the main characteristics of familicide, a rare and poorly understood form of homicide.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community as it shows that family mass murders represent an important part of domestic homicides, especially in Italy where the value of “family” has declined.

Family mass murder or familicide is a subtype of domestic homicide. The latter represents murders in which the perpetrators and the victims are both men and women with different degrees of kinship. The former is an enlarged form of intrafamilial homicide with multiple killings, usually involving the offender's spouse, one or more of the children, and, sometimes, the offender himself. Few documents provide an in-depth study of familicides because public interest and crime statistics tend to focus more on domestic/intrafamilial homicides in general than on specific and rare forms such as family massacres.¹ In Italy, the Home Office (Minister of Interior) and the security forces do not have a national registry for familicide incidents, and neither does the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). What is known is that 155 incidents of domestic homicide occurred in Italy in 2012 (72 intrafamilial), 113 in 2010 (81 intrafamilial), 122 in 2009 (97 intrafamilial), and that they took place more often in Northern Italy.² Between 1985 and 2008, 89.5% of homicide-suicide mass murders in Italy involved family situations, and in all cases of familicide between 1990 and 2009 in the province of Milan, firearms were used.^{3,4}

Familicide may be perpetrated by any family member, but most often involves the male head of the household. It is often carefully planned in advance and very often followed by suicide. The event is usually preceded by a gradual but steady increase in stress due to financial or personal factors and is precipitated by an event such as loss of a job or divorce that represents the final, unbearable stressor. Occasionally, the pets are also killed and the house is set on fire.

This presentation describes four cases of familicide-suicide in which the perpetrator was the husband and father of the victims and no apparent stressor had impacted the men or their family's lives.

The first case took place in March 1990 in Bisceglie. The husband was a 60-year-old man who had recently moved back to Italy with his family. The man stabbed his 66-year-old wife in the abdomen and in the back and then stabbed and shot the 24-year-old daughter as well as the family dog which was found close to the girl. He barricaded himself in the house and the next day he committed suicide by cutting his left elbow and forearm and shooting himself in the head.

In March 1991, the second familicide happened in Bari. A 32-year-old man killed his 35-year-old wife and his children (4- and 8-years-old). He stabbed them in the neck, but the children did not die after this initial assault. He ultimately finished the killing by manual strangulation. He was convicted of the crime and committed by hanging suicide one week later in jail.

The third case dates back to March 2008 in Taranto, when a 48-year-old vascular surgeon killed his two daughters (11- and 14-years-old) with hammer blows to the head while his 43-year-old wife, tied to the bed, was listening to the screams of her children. He then reached the wife and struck her on the head with the same hammer used on the daughters. After the massacre, he took his own life by cutting his femoral artery with a scalpel.

The fourth case occurred in May 2013 in Sannicandro. A 54-year-old pharmacist shot his 58-year-old wife and 19-year-old daughter (who had Down's Syndrome) in the head while they were sleeping in their beds. He then waited in the living-room for his 24-year-old son to come home from his job. When he entered the house, the father shot him in the head from behind. After the massacre, he hid the gun and drowned himself in the swimming pool. When police arrived, only the son was still alive, but he died shortly thereafter in the hospital.

This presentation will analyze each case in detail and review literature about familicide.

References:

1. Schlesinger LB. Familicide, depression and catathymic process. *J Forensic Sci.* 2000;45(1):200-3.
2. RI2013. 25° Rapporto Italia. *Datanews Eurispes.*



Pathology/Biology Section - 2014

3. Roma P, Spacca A, Pompili M, Lester D, Tatarelli R, Girardi P, Ferracuti S. The epidemiology of homicide-suicide in Italy: A newspaper study from 1985 to 2008. *Forensic Sci Int*, 2012;214(1-3):e1-5.
 4. Merzagora I, Travaini G, Battistini A, Pleuteri L. Murder-suicide in the province of Milan, Italy: Criminological analysis of cases 1990-2009. *Med Sci Law*, 2011;51(2):87-92.
-

Familicide, Homicide/Suicide, Mass Murder