



Pathology/Biology Section - 2015

H71 The New Italian Law on Femicide: Was There a Real Reduction of Cases of Femicide? The Foggia (Apulia, Italy) Scenario

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the evolution of the Italian scenario of femicide after the enactment of a new Italian law.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting information about the introduction of new Italian legislation and its effects on the reduction of cases of femicide, as reported by the Italian Ministry of the Interior; however, in Foggia, an increase of femicides was observed, resulting in many discordant opinions on the matter.

The word femicide is very recent. In 1992, Diana Russell, with the term “femicide,” defined it as extreme violence against a woman by a man because she is a woman, while in the 1990s, several terms were used to describe the murder of a woman that occurred within a relationship or cohabitation, including spousal homicide and family-related homicide. Statistics show that when a woman is killed, the perpetrator is often a man who has been intimately involved with her. A total of 2,412 femicides were recorded in Italy between 2000 and February 2014. Of these, 1,698 were committed inside the victim’s house or during relationships and 1,059 were committed by the husband, intimate partner, or ex-boyfriend. In 2013, a woman was murdered every three days in Italy and femicide represented 35.33% of all homicides. Due to the severity of this issue, in Italy a law was enacted in 2013 (Law n° 119, October 15th 2013). This law concerns new rules to fight gender-based violence in order to prevent femicide and protect victims, all within the framework outlined by the Convention of Istanbul (2011), the first legally binding international instrument on preventing and combating violence against women (defined as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that could result in physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life) and domestic violence (violence that occurs within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim). According to the data of the central management of the Italian Criminal Police (State Police), in the first two months of 2014 compared to the same period in 2013, a decrease in cases of femicides was noted. In fact, in January/February 2013, femicides represented 29.41% of all homicides, compared with 22.4% of cases in January/February 2014; however, only the complete data of the year 2014 provide an insight into whether the law has achieved the desired results.

The goal of this study is to review the autopsy cases performed at the Department of Forensic Pathology, University of Foggia, Italy. Cases of femicide were selected and categorized according to the emotional relationship between the victim and the killer and on the basis of manner of death. The cases of femicide from 2001 to 2014 at the Department of Forensic Science of the University of Foggia were analyzed. An analysis of 1,281 autopsies performed in the department is presented with the goal of selecting which and how many of these were murders that had female victims, evaluating the mechanism of death, and the history of sentimental relationship between the victim and the offender. Of the 136 homicides in Foggia, 38 were femicides committed by the husband (18), intimate partner (15), ex-boyfriend (2), son (1), cousin (1), and uncle (1). Of the 38 femicides, 14 presented with blunt injuries, eight with stab wounds (1 with decapitation), 7 with gunshot wounds, 5 from asphyxial mechanism (1 with drowning after being linked to the hands and feet and sealed by scotch tape on the mouth, 2 by suffocation, 2 by strangulation), and 4 combined gunshot and blunt injuries.

Unfortunately, the data seems to confirm the doubts about the effectiveness of the law on femicide as they show an increase. In the case series, femicides represented 27.56% of all homicides before the enactment of the law and 40% of all homicides in the months after the law came into effect. In conclusion, the data continue to show a worrying increase in femicides.

Femicide, Homicide, Italian Law