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I17 Profiling in Violent Crimes: The Perpetrator and the Victim in Portuguese Cases of Filicide

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how filicide, the murder of a child by a parent, is a multifaceted phenomenon with various causes and characteristics.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the present state of knowledge regarding filicide perpetrated by either the mother or father.

Goal: The goal of this study is to describe the homicide of children in Portugal and to examine the gender differences in filicidal offense characteristics and associated variables in order to establish a common profile of filicidal offenders and victims. Limitations of the current study and future directions for research will be presented.

Methods: This retrospective study was approved by the Ethics Committee from the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Coimbra and the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (NILMFS). The material of the present study was register-based, comprehensive, and nationwide. The information concerning all deaths certified as homicide or with an undetermined/unknown cause in 29 Portuguese medicolegal and forensic offices, for children under 18 years of age, for the period 2004-2013 was examined. Forty-two cases of filicide were analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 19.0 statistical software package. The assessed variables related to the perpetrator included demographic characteristics (e.g., age, sex, ancestry, marital status, and residence area). The assessed variables related to the victim included age, sex, ancestry, circumstances of birth, and number of victims. The variables related to the crime were correlated with the sex of the perpetrator (e.g., crime type, method, motive, post-offense behavior, suicide, and moment of the crime).

Results: A total of 39 perpetrators (six fathers and 33 mothers) killed 42 child victims (21 were male and 21 were female). Statistically significant differences were found between the sex of the perpetrator and the post-offense behavior ($r=.383$), the method ($r=-.323$), and the circumstances of the birth of the child ($r=.394$) to a level of significance of 0.05.

Conclusions: Most of the crimes were committed by young, unmarried Caucasian females between 21 and 30 years of age. The victims were mostly newborns ($n=17$) in non-hospital settings ($n=16$) and resulted from unintended pregnancies. Neonaticide was the most predominant crime with the use of manual and impersonal methods (i.e., fall, suffocation, drowning, strangulation, and intoxication). Males were older, married or divorced, who killed using more violent methods (i.e., firearms and knives) for revenge or retaliation against their companions. Their victims were also older. A better understanding of potentially fatal parental/familial dynamics leading to filicide could facilitate the identification of risk and enable effective intervention strategies.

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Profiling, Filicide, Infanticide