



## Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section - 2015

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### **I35 Paternal Filicide for Spousal Revenge: The Male Side of Medea's Syndrome in the Italian Population Over the Last Ten Years**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand Medea's syndrome as it applies to fathers, by observing the prevalence of this syndrome in Italy during the last ten years (from 2005 to 2014).

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating that a substantial proportion of cases due to Medea's complex are attributable not only to mothers but also to fathers. Although it is traditionally thought that mothers kill their children for revenge against their fathers, the opposite can also happen.

By consulting the archives of an important Italian national newspaper, "Corriere della Sera", this study chronicled all the cases of children or teenagers killed by their fathers due to spousal revenge. Twenty-eight cases were analyzed, focusing on spatial and temporal distribution, age, nationality of the fathers and children, gender of the children, the fathers' occupations, the methods of killing, and any association with suicide.

Results showed that 64.5% of cases occurred between 2005 and 2009, mostly in February, July, and December; in fact, these are holiday months (Valentine's Day, summertime, or Christmas, respectively), which may explain the high concentration of cases during this period. Regionally, 57.1% of cases occurred in Northern Italy, but major population density in other regions must be taken into account; 82.1% of perpetrators were Italian with others being from Egypt, Slovenia, Romania, and Nigeria, demonstrating that it is not a phenomenon linked to immigration. Additionally, 42.8% of these fathers were employed, 25% were unemployed, and 21.4% were self employed, with most experiencing financial difficulties, showing this may be a risk factor. Fifty-four percent of the children killed were between one and ten years of age. This differs from female perpetrators, who generally kill their children when they are less than one year of age. Moreover, 67.6% of the children killed were male, as if there were a sort of gender identification with the victim. The methods of killing were mostly violent: 39.3% by blunt force trauma; 21.4% by gunshot trauma; 21.4% by sharp force trauma; only 14.3% were due to asphyxia, which is a less violent method generally used by maternal killers. In 51.3% of the cases, a relationship separation existed, evidencing a possible strong correlation between these crimes and jealousy or revenge. In 24.3% of the cases, perpetrator depression was associated with the act and in only 8.1% of the cases, other contributors such as substance abuse or cultural or religious divergences were noted. In 64.3% of the cases, a perpetrator suicide or attempted suicide was involved, possibly indicating guilt or a great sense of inadequacy and unease rooted in the father who committed the act.

This study sheds light on an almost-forgotten segment of fathers who murder their own children simply for revenge against their partners, representing the male side of the so-called Medea's syndrome.

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#### **Medea Complex, Filicide, Revenge**