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H62 Victim Characteristics and Injury Patterns Associated With Intimate Partner Sharp Force Homicides

Elizabeth A. Douglas, MD, Western Michigan University, 1000 Oakland Drive, Kalamazoo, MI 49008*

After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to summarize the patterns of injuries associated with intimate partner sharp force homicides.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by assisting law enforcement in narrowing the pool of potential suspects in sharp force homicide cases by identifying patterns of injury commonly seen in specific victim-perpetrator relationships.

Background: While it is known that females are more likely to be victims of intimate partner homicides and males are more likely than females to be killed by a stranger, the variability in injury pattern by victim sex in the context of intimate partner sharp force homicides has not been extensively studied.

Methods: A retrospective analysis was performed of the available forensic autopsy records for sharp force homicides perpetrated by adults in the populations served by Sparrow Forensics and the Department of Pathology in the Western Michigan University School of Medicine, which were either adjudicated or abated by suicide for the period from 2006 through June 2016. Law enforcement reports, court records, media coverage, and investigative reports from the medical examiner's office were reviewed. The victim-offender relationship, location of injuries, and number of injuries were analyzed.

Results: Among the 54 sharp force homicide cases analyzed, 14 cases were excluded, including 2 cases with multiple assailants, 4 cases perpetrated by juvenile offenders, and 8 cases in which a suspect was not identified. Of the remaining 40 cases, there were 24 male victims and 16 female victims.

Ten of the male victims were killed by female perpetrators. Nine of the ten cases perpetrated by females against males occurred between intimate partners, and the tenth case occurred between neighbors. None of the male victims killed by a female perpetrator suffered more than three wounds, no injuries occurred above the clavicles, and 90% of the victims suffered a single stab wound of the chest. Fourteen of the male victims were killed by male perpetrators, and the relationship between victim and perpetrator included relatives ($n = 4$), neighbors ($n = 4$), acquaintances ($n = 3$), and one case each of murder for hire, love triangle, and roommates. Six of the male victims killed by male perpetrators suffered a single sharp force injury, with five of the injuries occurring on the chest only. Victims who suffered more than five sharp force injuries were more likely to be related to their attackers ($n = 4/7$) and to have injuries occurring on the head, neck, or face ($n = 4/6$).

All sixteen female victims were killed by male perpetrators and included intimate partners ($n = 9$), strangers ($n = 3$), acquaintances ($n = 3$), and neighbors ($n = 1$). Two of these victims suffered a single stab wound of the neck. Two victims suffered two sharp force injuries, and in each case at least one of the injuries was of the head, face, or neck. The remaining victims ($n = 12$) suffered between 4 and 85 sharp force injuries, with the highest number of injuries occurring in victims who were strangers or acquaintances to their attackers. Eleven of sixteen female victims suffered at least one sharp force injury to the head, face, or neck. Seven of nine females killed by male intimate partners suffered more than one sharp force injury with at least one injury occurring on the head, face, or neck.



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Conclusions: Patterns of injuries in sharp force homicides vary by the sex of the assailant and the relationship to their victim. Patterns of injuries inflicted by female perpetrators are different than those inflicted by male assailants. In the context of intimate partner violence, male perpetrators are far more likely to inflict injuries above the clavicles, and female perpetrators are far more likely to inflict a single sharp force injury of the chest.

Sharp Force, Victim Characteristics, Injury Patterns