

I29 Family Secrets: When the Horror in the House Has No Obvious Cause and the Need for Unveiling

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the importance of both the criminological and anthropological investigation in understanding a crime associated with forensic investigations and forensic psychiatric and psychological investigations.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by serving as an example of the importance of reconstructing the life experiences of the perpetrator and the victim, in order to unveil the pathway leading to a particularly complex murder.

Particularly violent and brutal homicides, due to their mode of expression, sometimes present a contradictory and paradoxical scenario, complicating the forensic, psychiatric, and psychological forensic reconstructions.¹

The case is that of a 67-year-old man, a typographer, married with children, whose matrimonial life was apparently marked by quiet harmony until members of the wife's family (sister and mother) intervened in the relationship. After that, the man said his wife had become authoritarian and aggressive, deliberately humiliating him, and their relationship had deteriorated. On the day of the homicide, the woman had, as usual, adopted an authoritarian attitude and started to shout and push her husband. The husband, after having endured this humiliation for many years, suddenly and repeatedly struck her with an axe he was carrying in a bag, inflicting numerous blows that caused significant damage to her head. Immediately after, the man phoned for help.

The man's psychiatric history was negative, and there were no signs of cognitive impairment. For this destructive act directed against his wife, qualifying as abnormal on the psychopathological plane, relevant motivational elements emerged. There were no signs suggesting a temporary psychotic decompensation nor a criminal plan. The scenario depicted a murder of impulse rather than premeditated aggression, bearing in mind the impromptu weapon used (he had not even removed the axe from the bag). In short, it was not an idea that had long been brooded upon and finally implemented (as occurs in cases of delirium), but a deep underlying discomfort that finally erupted as a result of a quarrel (although this was denied), triggered by a contingent event (a verbal provocation) that brought on frustration, followed by an act of physical aggression (a shove) that had an explosive effect on the perpetrator of the murder. From the medical-legal consultation, it emerged that the man had continued relentlessly striking the woman even after she had fallen to the ground, denoting not only that his emotions were completely out of control, but also his wish to "destroy" the victim. The homicidal behavior appeared disorganized, whereas immediately after the murder, he reacted in a usual way, calling for help.

Faced with such a terrible scene, limited information was gained from the forensic psychiatric and psychological assessment conducted on the perpetrator. The man had no criminal record and did not use drugs or alcohol. This elderly person, retired, leading an ordinary and peaceful life, was described by everyone (family, friends, coworkers, jail staff) as a kind person, very polite, and helpful. The only significant finding from information obtained from his children was that the victim had a difficult character, was rigid and complex, and often abused her husband, who had

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patiently endured it for 26 years. Despite the absence of signs of severe mental illness or important criminal motive, the cause of this murder conducted within the domestic walls of a normal family is to be traced to the relational and historical aspects of the family structure and of the subjects involved in the crime.²

The medicolegal, psychiatric, and forensic psychology assessments must include a criminological and relational anthropological analysis, with the goal of establishing a reason for committing such a terrible murder, through close study of the experiences of the subjects involved, and the context in which the murder was committed.³

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