



I11 Spousal Homicide: What Do We Know and How Do We Prevent It From Happening?

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Learning Overview: After attending the presentation, attendees will: (1) understand the psychopathological basis of spousal homicide, (2) be able to identify the risk factors associated with this crime, and (3) understand how France and, more broadly, Europe, have developed prevention measures.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing practical data of a crime that remains under-studied and by showing how to implement measures that are crucial for the safety of these victims.

Spousal homicide is a term used when the victim is killed by her/his partner or ex-partner. This type of murder is the most frequent one when looking at murders happening within the family circle. It also constitutes 16% to 20% of murders. Prevention measures regarding spousal homicide are under-developed because of being perceived as an exceptional situation. However, research has shown that the offenders committing spousal homicide have a well-defined profile, along with their *modus operandi*, compared to the other types of homicide.

The circumstances leading to such a tragic event are related to several factors, including the personality of each individual of the couple, situational crisis, and the quality of their relationship. This crime is often portrayed by the media as a horrific one, scaring the community, notably because it occurs in a close relationship, which is supposed to be where anyone could feel safe. This crime is primarily committed by males, aged 30 to 60 years old, when the couple is in the process of breaking up or when there is persistent conflict in their relationship. The home is where this crime commonly occurs. Alcohol is frequently found as a contributing factor at the time of the offense. Prior violent behavior of the offender toward the victim is also often a characteristic. Contrary to other types of homicide, no current or past psychiatric history is found. From a pathopsychological perspective, jealousy and willingness to control the victim are often seen as precipitating factors. Other psychological elements of the offender can explain why he decides to act out, such as anger, fear of abandonment, and the need to make these feeling stop. At this point, research regarding female offenders in the context of spousal homicide remains limited. So far, the data suggests that their motivation is different from male offenders. This speaks to the necessity of continuing studying this area to understand the origin of this behavior.

National and European measures were recently developed to help improve the support of women victims of violence from their partner and to find the most appropriate means to prevent any escalation toward lethal actions. These measures may not help resolve every situation because there remain cases in which no prior violence existed before the impulsive and lethal act of their partner. It is necessary to know the common risk factors that are associated with the spousal homicide situation in order to prevent it from happening. Informing professionals who may be in the best position to detect these situations, but also the public, is necessary to help these potential victims.

Homicide, Domestic Violence, Acting Out