



I16 Women and Men Who Committed Murders: Male/Female Psychopathic Homicides

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Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to examine gender differences in psychopathic homicides.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by redefining the concept of female psychopathy and, consequently, of the available diagnostic tools.

Introduction: The relationship between the psychopathic dimension and homicide is controversial. The origins of psychopathy and its psychopathological position are still controversial. This disorder is characterized by manifestations that involve the subject’s emotional drive and interpersonal sphere, as well as the lack of respect for other people’s rights and for social rules. This is an important risk factor for antisocial and violent acts. Moreover, this increases criminal recidivism and hinders therapeutic change.

Psychopathic homicide, according to the psychopath’s personality traits, are either committed to obtain a personal benefit (e.g., money, sexual opportunities, status enhancement) or they are a result of a sadistic and predatory behavior, which is frequently associated with substance abuse. Moreover, some gender differences can also be observed in the homicide phenomenon regarding victims, weapons, and psychopathic dimension.

Methodology: This study involved male and female murderers suffering from a mental pathology with excluded and partial criminal responsibility who had been interned in the Residence for the Execution of Security Measures (REMS) of Castiglione delle Stiviere, Puglia, and Basilicata as a security measure to prevent the risk of criminal recidivism, together with male and female prisoners of Calabria, Basilicata, and Puglia convicted of murder with full criminal responsibility from March 2015 through the end of 2017. The sample consisted of 39 female and 48 male perpetrators of homicide and attempted homicide.

The entire sample of male and female murderers was assessed by the Structured Clinical Interview for *DSM-5* (SCID-5) and the Personality Inventory for *DSM-5*—Informant Form (PID-5 IRF) (per the American Psychological Association [APA], 2015), which were recently validated for the Italian population to determine major psychiatric disorders and personality traits, respectively, and can also be used by an examiner. In addition, the validated Italian version of the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) was used.

Results: This study analyzed the total scores of the PCL-R and scores for Factor 1 and Factor 2. In the overall analyzed sample, this study found an average score of 13.18 (standard deviation (sd): 7.19); in the male group, 12.29 (sd 6.36); and in the female group, 14.28 (sd 8.05). Therefore, in all cases, an average value was found that was below the threshold that defines the condition of psychopathy. Statistically significant was the difference between the two groups of homicide/attempted homicide committed by men or women in regard to the distribution of Factor 1 scores, which evaluated the interpersonal/affective aspects. Here, the total average score obtained from the entire sample was 6.65 (sd: 4.22). However, this study obtained an average of 5.54 (sd: 3.49) for men and a higher value for women, with an average of 8.02 (sd: 4.65).

The differences observed for Factor 2, which concerns the aspects of social deviance, were less significant. Therefore, the average in the total sample was 6.19 (sd: 3.77); in the group of men, 6.48 (sd: 3.77); and in the group of women, 5.85 (sd: 3.79).

Conclusion: This study allowed reflection on how psychopathic traits are expressed when they are associated with the maximum expression of social deviance: homicide and attempted homicide. Therefore, based on the results obtained, it is possible to state that: (1) contrary to expectations, from an epidemiological point of view, the psychopathic dimension in this sample was not pronounced in crimes such as homicide and attempted homicide; and (2) there are differences in the phenotypic manifestations of the psychopathic dimension in this sample between the male and female genders. In women, expressions of psychopathy are more closely related to interpersonal/affective disorders, rather than to antisocial behavior, which is more frequent in men.

Finally, it is important to point out that, although the PCL-R represents an accurate assessment tool for women as well as men, its theoretical construct would require a “feminine” review, especially for Factor F1, which concerns the affective-interpersonal manifestations of women. Indeed, in line with other international surveys, this research indicates the existence of gender differences. Therefore, some work is required to redefine the concept of female psychopathy and, consequently, of the available diagnostic tools.

Murders, Gender, Psychopathic