

### W5 The Psychopathology of Homicide

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the relationship between psychopathology and the phenomenon of homicide.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating how the identification of the features of psychopathology of homicide can inform treatment planning.

**Introduction:** Homicide is the most serious form of antisocial behavior. Despite its personal, social, and economic impact, homicide is among the least studied comprehensible forms of antisocial and violent behavior. The relationship between major psychiatric disorders and homicides has been much debated in the scientific literature.<sup>1-4</sup> Although it is known that most extreme violent acts are committed by subjects without any history of psychiatric pathology, some research suggests there is a correlation between schizophrenia spectrum disorders, severe personality disorders, and homicide.<sup>2,4</sup>

The homicides associated with a psychotic dimension present specific characteristics.<sup>3</sup> The relationship between the murderous ability to plan an antisocial act does not necessarily exclude a possible diagnosis of schizophrenia. Even more controversial is the relationship between the psychopathic dimension and homicide. Psychopathic homicides are usually goal-oriented. A non-psychopathic murderer usually commits a crime with a different type of violence, often as a result of frustration. Moreover, some gender differences can also be observed in the homicide phenomenon, whether the murder is committed by an offender affected by a psychotic disorder or is committed by a man or a woman with a psychopathic personality profile. Besides the diagnosis, it is important to point out that usually women express this antisocial behavior in a different way compared to men.<sup>3</sup>

In homicide, suspected homicide, and other suspicious or obscure cases, the role of an experienced forensic pathologist at the scene of death is generally to assess the environment, the local circumstances, and the position and the condition of the body.<sup>5-7</sup> Homicide grows out of a transaction between individuals, which is a product of the individuals and their relationship. Behaviors can thus be seen to follow a definite pattern that can be related to underlying psychological principles, which closely relate to how an offender interacts with the victim at the crime scene.<sup>8-10</sup>

Homicide can occur together with suicide in the same episode. An earlier classification of combined homicide-suicide, which considered the perpetrator's psychopathology and relationship with the victim(s) will be updated to incorporate recent studies. Individual acts of homicide-suicide can be understood by considering three contributing factors: (1) ego weaknesses or psychopathology of the perpetrator, (2) stressors, and (3) the psychological vector directing this specific act. Studied attention will be given to female homicide-suicide perpetrators and gender differences. Within this context will be considered homicide-suicide terrorists and female bombers in particular.

In the light of these premises, it can be understood how the forensic expert evaluation of the criminal responsibility of murder defendants presents specific difficulties, as well as having a significant impact in the criminal trial. Crime scene investigation requires a multidisciplinary approach by an expert team in order to shed light on difficult cases, such as murders staged as suicides or accidents.

This workshop's speakers will debate from different point of views the scenarios outlined above. The psychopathology of men and women who kill; psychopathology of men and women of criminal organizations, such as the Sicilian mafia; combined homicide suicide; the Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity (NGRI) killers—a national sample; forensic psychiatric evaluation of defendants in homicide cases—literature analysis and forensic cases; and treatment outcomes following a conviction of killing. Several general pathologists will speak on topics that pertain to the killer's mental state from the perspective of forensic pathology and investigation of homicide. The criminological and psychiatric data from a multicenter national Italian sample of forensic psychiatric patients will be also discussed.

**Conclusions:** The main purpose of this workshop is to highlight the pathological aspects of homicide: attendees will acquire information about the psychopathology of homicide from the different presentations, in which there will be an opportunity to describe the history of the disease, the treatment, the outcomes, and the criminal history of individuals who committed the crime of murder without mental responsibility because of their psychiatric illness. The speakers with different professional experiences will include in their presentations original data from recent not-yet-published investigations.

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#### Homicide, Psychopathology, Suicide

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