

Domestic Homicides; The First Series From Turkey

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Abstract

Domestic homicide can be described as the most severe form of domestic violence. This study aimed to determine general characteristics of domestic homicide cases in our region. Homicide cases concluded in Hatay and Kahramanmaras high criminal courts between 2005 and 2010 were retrospectively evaluated. Out of a total of 7741 cases 47 were involving domestic homicides. The average age of perpetrators was 35.44 ± 14.48 while the average age of victims was 33.48 ± 18.78 years. Number of males was higher than females as both among victims and perpetrators. Honor issues related homicides took the first place with 17 cases. Firearms were the most common instrument to commit homicide, of which shotguns took the first place with 15 cases. Dispute of sharing property and honor issues were the leading causes of domestic homicides. The victims and perpetrators were usually middle-aged and the most common weapon used to commit homicide was firearms.

Key Words: Domestic homicide; Honor homicide; Domestic violence

Introduction

Domestic violence can be defined as “any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to a family member or an intimate partner, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (1). The most severe form of domestic violence is homicide. Furthermore, domestic homicide constitutes 30-40% of all homicide cases. Domestic homicides are associated with various social and cultural differences. Studies, from different countries, dealing with domestic homicides showed several

different characteristics in this particular phenomenon (2,3).

The literature regarding intimate partner homicides addresses conflict, disagreement and violence between intimate partners, spousal abuse, and family violence as risk factors leading homicide. Mental illnesses and drug-alcohol abuse were reported as additional risk factors related these homicides (4). In such cases, homicide committed by men against women in general. However, filicide cases are encountered as well. A number of murderers commit suicide after committing homicide. The most common method used in domestic homicide was reported to be firearm (5,6,7,8).

Being a neglected area in our country, this study aims to determine general characteristics of domestic homicide cases that cause serious destruction of a family, by examining the first domestic homicide series from Turkey.

Material and Methods

Hatay and Kahramanmaras are two neighboring cities with their similar population characteristics located in south-central of Turkey. There are two high criminal courts in each of these cities. From these courts, domestic homicide cases concluded between 2006 and 2010 were retrospectively studied. Cases involved wife, mother, father, children and siblings as victims or perpetrator of murder were included in the scope of the study. Non-married intimate partner homicides were excluded. Cases were investigated in terms of age, gender,

degree of kinship, the tool and method used in committing homicide and the alleged cause for homicide. Obtained data were statistically analyzed using SPSS 16.0 the statistical package software.

Results

During the study period, there were 3290 cases concluded in Hatay High Criminal Court while 3451 cases concluded in Kahramanmaras High Criminal Court. Of these, 23 and 24, a total of 47, were domestic homicide cases concluded Hatay and Kahramanmaras courts, respectively. The average age of perpetrators was 35.44 (± 14.48) and the youngest was 16 while the oldest was 76 years old. Similarly, the average age of victims was 33.48 (± 18.78) and the youngest was one years old, while the eldest was 73 years old. The ages of victims and perpetrators are shown in Table 1 and Table 2. The homicidal act was noticed to occur mostly between siblings and spouses (Table 3).

Table 1: Age distribution of perpetrators

Gender	Age Grups (years)					Total
	≤ 20	21-30	31-40	41-50	$51 \geq$	
Male	5	11	8	6	8	38
Female	1	3	4	1	0	9
Total	6(%12.8)	14(%29.8)	12(%25.5)	7(%14.9)	8(%17)	47(%100)

Table 2: Age distribution of victims

Gender	Age Grups (years)					Total
	≤20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51≥	
Male	4	5	6	5	5	25
Female	8	3	2	6	3	22
Total	12 (%25.5)	8 (%17)	8(%17)	11 (%23.4)	8(%17)	47(%100)

Table 3: Kinship of victims' with perpetrators

Victims' kinship	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Father	6	12.8
Mother	5	10.6
Sibling	14	29.8
Spouse	12	25.5
Daughter	4	8.5
Son	4	8.5
Grandfather	1	2.1
Grandchild	1	2.1
Total	47	100

Distribution of cases in term of gender revealed that number of males was higher than females as both among victims and perpetrators. The number of male perpetrators was 38 (80.9) while the number of females was 9 (19.1%). On the other hand, the number of male victims was 25 (53.2%) and the number of females was 22 (46.8%).

Analyzing the alleged causes of homicide; honor homicide took the first place with 17 (36.2%) cases followed by dispute of sharing of property as the second cause of homicide with 11 (23.4%) cases. The remaining causes were mental illnesses (n: 7, 14.9%), family conflicts (n: 7, 14.9%), alleged accident (n:2, 4.3%), insanity (n:2, 4.3%), child delivery due to sexual assault (n: 1, 2.1%).

Firearms were the most common instrument to commit homicide. Among these shotguns took the first place with 15 cases while pistols used in 8 cases.

Stabbing was the second most common method of homicide (Table 4).

Table 4 Distribution of types of instruments/methods used in homicide

Type of Instrument	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Firearm	23	48.9
Stabbing	16	34.2
Manuel strangulation	3	6.4
Shotgun and stabbing	1	2.1
Jump from a height	1	2.1
Blunt trauma	2	4.2
Poisoning	1	2.1
Total	47	100

Discussion

In our country, there is a patriarchal structure in both the family and community levels, which make men more active in all areas of life. For this reason, from simple crimes to homicide, criminals are mostly men. The responsibilities of protection and maintaining a family are given men, the householder, as a cultural rule. In problems involving family the householder is to fulfill the responsibility to solve the problem. Because of these, in cases involving honor issues and dispute of sharing property, the high rate of male perpetrator was an expected finding in the present series. Similarly, the rate of male victims was also higher because of high rate of cases of sharing of property.

A review of the literature reveals that victims of homicides in general are mostly

middle aged while victims of domestic homicides are older in age. The rate of elderly killings is reported to have increased in domestic homicides committed in recent years, in Canada (3,9,10). In our country, a study dealing with 438 victims of homicide, the most common age group was found to be 21-30 years (10). A study examining domestic homicides committed by spouses in police families showed that most of victims were below the age of 40 (6). Similar to the literature, in our study, the majority of those both perpetrators and victims were in the middle age group. However, compared to the literature, since the present study deals with domestic homicides the rate of older age victims was expected to be higher. This difference is thought to

originate from alleged causes of homicides.

The most common victims of domestic homicides have reported to be spouses followed by children, siblings and other family members (2). On the contrary to the literature, the present study showed that the most common victim of domestic homicides were siblings, which thought to be consequent of alleged causes of homicides. Because the most common cause of homicide was noticed to be the dispute of sharing property, which was an expected results for authors as national media commonly address domestic homicides caused by the dispute of sharing property. With economic development and well-functioning law on the sharing of property, western societies rarely encounter domestic homicides due to such cause. In developing countries such as Turkey, desire for economic prosperity, fear of economically uncertain future and heavy-functioning legal system remain as risk factors leading people to commit homicide.

The main cause of domestic homicides is reported to be domestic violence and female spouses are 4-5 times more victimized than males. Furthermore, the ratio of female spouses killed by married or non-married intimate partners is found to be 9 times higher than those killed by a stranger (4,5,6,11). Similarly, in this study, the proportion of women killed by their husbands/spouses took the second place with 25.5% of cases among domestic homicides. However, the alleged reasons for the homicides were not compatible with the literature. The literature on intimate partner homicide have addressed violence between the two partners, spousal abuse, and domestic violence as the most common cause of homicide while it was dispute of sharing property followed by honor homicides in our series. The term

honor means to act in compatible with traditions and is of high importance for people and for women in particular. Usually women, who are believed to bring shame on honor of family by her acts, are killed because of honor while the men involved in the acts causing dishonor are also at risk. The concept of traditions/honor is sacred, in our society. The acts against traditions/honor are strongly punished while even acts against religious values responded in a more tolerant way. In situations as family dishonor, family members do not hesitate to kill man or woman who believed to dishonor to family. For example, a woman who performs illegitimate sexual intercourse or victimized of sexual assault is wanted to die by her husband and her biological family members as well. Another reason for finding low rate of homicide between spouses is committing homicide before civil marriage. Since these cases was not official families, non-married intimate partner homicides and cases involving religious marriage were excluded.

Firearm use was reported to be the most common method both in homicide of intimate partners/spouses and of other family members. However, stabbing take the first place in homicide in general (2,3,4,5,6,7,12). Similar to the literature, the most common homicide method was shooting by firearm with 48.9% of cases, in our series. In the majority of these (n:15) cases used firearms were shotguns. Firearm use is highly common particularly in honor homicides, in our country. Shotguns are easily available in households because of easy licensing and being cheap. As the second common method, stabbing committed by knives that are common in kitchens.

Certain characteristic differences have been reported among perpetrator of

domestic homicides and homicides in general. The existence of certain common characteristics of perpetrators of domestic homicide was emphasized. Perpetrators of domestic homicide are stated to be mostly single, unemployed, from low socioeconomic level, dismissed from military service. Furthermore, growing up in dysfunctional families, having antisocial parent, and drug addiction are addressed as other characteristics of perpetrators of domestic homicides (2). In the present study, mental illness was identified in 7 perpetrators.

As a conclusion, on the contrary to the literature, dispute of sharing property and honor issues were found to be the leading causes of domestic homicides. The victims and perpetrators were usually middle-aged. As the similarity with the literature, the most common weapon used to commit homicide was firearm.

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