



Filicide among Prisoners in a Psychiatric Tertiary Institute

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Abstract

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Introduction

Filicide though a rare event has been reported in various literatures. The term filicide denotes murder of a child by a parent, while neonaticide specifies the killing of a child on the day of birth and infanticide refers to killing of a child under the age of 12 months by a mother who has not fully recovered from the effects of pregnancy and lactation and suffers some degree of mental disturbances⁽¹⁻³⁾. Analyzing the factors leading to filicide facilitate the early identification of the high risk and effective intervention. Little evidence is available on the commission of filicide and lack of knowledge in this area makes the prevention of the crime difficult.

Resnick and Hatters Friedman⁽⁴⁻⁵⁾ have proposed a classification based on the motive for the filicide as Altruism, Acute psychosis, Unwanted child, Accident or child maltreatment and spousal revenge. Altruistic filicide is committed with the motive of relieving the child of real or, most often, imaginary suffering, and usually involves a suicidal attempt by a parent. Acute psychosis involves severely mentally ill parents who kill their children while in a psychotic state. In the unwanted child category, the victim is born unwanted and is burden to the uncertain and incapable parent, whereas accidental deaths, later termed fatal maltreatment, filicides are unintentional due to a single episode or recurrent episodes of battering.

Mentally ill filicides refers to persons in which the offences are associated with diagnosable mental illness at the time of filicide. The main reasons for maternal filicide enlisted are post partum phenomenon, hormonal influences and other non specific mental disturbances in the mother. There only few studies available on filicide which is mainly from the western world. O Somosundaram et al had studied the murder trails in tamilnadu (1968) in which he had mentioned about the child victims⁽¹⁰⁾. There are very few studies from India. Hence efforts have been made to study filicide among mentally ill prisoners at our institute.

Aim:

To estimate the prevalence of filicide among prisoners referred to a tertiary psychiatric institute in South India

Methodology:

The study was conducted at a tertiary psychiatric care hospital which has separate prisoners ward both for male and female. The study was approved by institutional ethics committee. The data of all the prisoners referred to institute between years 2000-2016 were analyzed. Socio demographic profile, crime details, and the diagnosis made as per ICD-10 criteria were evaluated and the results were analyzed. This was a retrospective life chart review.

The results were as percentage for qualitative variables and mean and standard deviation for quantitative variables

Results:

354 prisoner’s data were analyzed, out of which the most common crime was murder noted in 147

prisoners. Among the murder committed the data of filicide was collected separately and analyzed. Out of the 147 murders, 18 of them were filicide. Maternal filicide was found in 15(83%), and paternal filicide in 3(17%).

The mean age of perpetrators was 30.33

Table1: Socio demographic profile of perpetrators

Variable1: Age	N=18	%
20-30	4	22
30-40	10	56
>40	4	22
Variable 2: Marital status	N=18	%
Married	18	100
Unmarried	0	0
Variable 3: Area	N=18	%
Urban	12	67
Rural	6	33
Variable 3: Socio economic status	N=18	%
Lower	14	78
Middle/Lower middle	4	22
Lower/Upper lower	0	0
Variable 4: Education	N=18	%
Illiterate	8	44
Primary school	6	34
Middle school	3	16
High school	0	0
Graduate	1	6
Variable 5:	N=18	%
Unskilled	10	56
Skilled	2	12
Unemployment	6	32

We found that most of perpetrators were among the age group between 30-40yrs (56%). All were married and most of them were Illiterate (44%) followed by primary school education in 34%. Among the prisoners most of

them were from the urban area (67%) and majority was from Lower socio economic status (78%). Among the perpetrators most of them were unskilled workers (56%).

Table 2: Victim details of filicide

Variable 1: Age	N=20	%
< 1 year	7	35
1-5 year	10	50
5-10 year	1	5
>10 year	2	10
Variable 2: Sex	N=20	%
Male	7	35
Female	13	65

In two of the perpetrators two children were killed amounting to 20 victims

Among victims half of them (50%) were in the age 1-5year followed by infanticide (35%). Among the victims female filicide (65%) was predominant.

Table 3: Comparison of diagnosis in perpetrators

Diagnosis	N=18	%
Schizophrenia	6	33
Depression	5	28
Bipolar mood disorder(Mania)	1	6
Mental retardation	1	6
Psychosis Nos	3	17
Others	2	10

Among perpetrators 33% were suffering from schizophrenia, followed by depression (28%), next diagnosis was found to be psychosis (17%)

Table 4: Past H/o psychiatric illness in perpetrators

Variable:1 Past H/o psychiatric illness	N=18	%
Present	10	56
Nil	8	44
Variable:2 Past H/o suicidal attempts	N=18	%
Present	8	44

Nil	10	56
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Among perpetrators 56% have sought psychiatric care services previously. 44% of them attempted suicide in the past.

We have found that 3 of the perpetrators attempted suicide after committing the crime.

Taking into the account of mode of committing the crime, nine were due to drowning and two of them were killed by using knife. One of the children was killed by poisoning and others were killed by hitting and/or kicking or unspecified non-accidental injury.

Discussion:

In our study the mean age was 30.33 which was concordant with study done by Sandra M. Flynn et al⁽⁶⁾ in which the mean age was 27yrs in both maternal as well as paternal filicide.

Among the filicides maternal filicide was common in our study which was concordant with study done by Anne kauppi et al where the mothers are predominant perpetrators⁽⁷⁾

In our study all were married which was not concordant with other studies due to the cultural differences and the group of “Acutely psychotic filicide” in the hospital setting.

Regarding the mode of killing the children 45% was due to drowning and 40% was due to hitting/kicking or unspecified non accidental injury and this was concordant with study done by Anne Kauppi et al where in majority the mode of crime was drowning⁽⁷⁾

Among the sex of the victim, female children was the common victim (65%), and 55% was killed by mother. It has been suggested that mothers are more likely to kill girls and fathers to kill boys⁽¹¹⁾

A Finnish study of filicide- suicide found almost twice as many fathers as mothers committing filicide-suicides with fathers tending to kill more of their children than did mothers⁽⁹⁾. But in our study

Filicide-suicide was common among mothers which was not concordant with previous study because of overrepresentation of maternal filicide

Out of the seven victims under the age of one year, 6 victims (85.7%) were killed by mothers. Mothers were the perpetrators of crime between 1-5 yr age group. This was due to overrepresentation of maternal filicide than paternal filicide.

Among perpetrators 33% of them were suffering from schizophrenia which was concordant with various studies.

In our study 28% perpetrators suffered from depression and all were mothers and this was concordant with study done by Resnick et al who found that 67% of the 88 filicide mothers were psychotic and that major depression and schizophrenia /psychosis were more common in mothers than in fathers⁽⁸⁾

Personality disorders were diagnosed in all perpetrators in the Swedish study and in 41% of the maternal and 67% of the paternal perpetrators in the Finnish sample⁽⁷⁾. But this was not found in our study due to the sample involved in a tertiary care hospital setting

Limitations:

1. Our study was done in a hospital setting, and others in a prison setting, the comparison of results should be done with caution.
2. Our data was collected from the records which might leads to non-availability and imprecise data
3. It is a retrospective study, if done, interviewing the person directly and following them, might give better clarification for the study

Conclusion:

1. This is the only study in India about filicide in spite of its limitations.
2. Female children being the common victim, and most of them being under the age of 5yrs, specifies that aggression is shown towards the vulnerable group and the society and policy makers have major role in the prevention of crime.
3. History of seeking psychiatric consultation in the past and attempted suicide prior to the

filicide denotes that person with high risk if identified earlier and treated, could have prevented the crime.

4. Further research in filicide may throw insight into the actual factors leading to it and opportunities for understanding in this area.

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