



Masculinity and homicide-suicide

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1. Introduction

Since Ruth Cavan's groundbreaking study of homicide followed by suicide in Chicago (Cavan, 1928), research mainly located within psychology and forensic pathology shows that homicide-suicide episodes, whilst uncommon, occur across a broad range of countries for which data have been collected. These include: Australia (Easteal, 1993; Carcach and Grabosky, 1998); England and Wales (West, 1967; Milroy, 1993; Barraclough and Harris, 2002; Flynn et al., 2009; Gregory and Milroy, 2010); Canada (Buteau et al., 1993; Gillespie et al., 1998); Finland (Kivivuori and Lehti (2003); France (Le Comte and Fornes, 1998); Hong Kong: (Beh et al., 2005); Iceland (Gudjonsson and Petursson, 1982); Israel (Landau, 1975); USA (Barber et al., 2008; Campinelli and Gilson, 2002; Hanzlick and Kopenen, 1994). Reviewing 17 studies from 10 countries, Coid (1983) found that although the rate of homicide varied widely between countries, the rate of homicide-suicide was much less variable. It followed that in those countries with higher homicide rates, homicide-suicide as a percentage of homicide was smaller than in countries with lower homicide rates. Milroy (1995) reviewed the international literature again, analysing 27 studies from 17 countries and found these tendencies persisted. However, Cohen et al. (1998) found evidence to contradict this view, suggesting that homicide-suicide as a percentage of total homicides varies widely between countries, from as little as 3% to as much as 60%.

We know a good deal about the epidemiology of homicide-suicide from existing research (Harper and Voigt, 2007). The perpetrator is most likely to be a married, cohabiting or recently separated white male from the lower middle to working class, who kills his female partner, often at the point of separation (Easteal, 1993; Carcach and Grabosky, 1998; Barraclough and

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Harris, 2002). Homicide in general is a crime in which men predominate as both perpetrators and victims (Brookman, 2005; Dearden and Jones, 2008; Polk, 1994; Wolfgang, 1958; US Dept of Justice, 2009). When it comes to spousal murder, women are more likely than men to be victims. In the USA between 1975 and 2005, women were 33% of intimate homicide victims, and men 3% (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011). Edwards (1986) found in England and Wales that nine times more wives were killed by their husbands, and recent Home Office figures confirm this trend (Povey, 2008). Silverman and Mukherjee (1987) demonstrated that men were the perpetrators in 76% of what they refer to as ‘domestic stable’ homicides. In homicide-suicide episodes, the ratio of men to women perpetrators is even greater. When women are perpetrators in these episodes they almost always kill their children and then themselves; the incidence of women killing a partner or other adult and then themselves is very rare indeed (Barraclough and Harris, 2002; Flynn et al., 2009; Harper and Voight, 2007; Milroy, 1993).

The epidemiological and descriptive character of most homicide-suicide research provides very little in the way of theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. Working chiefly in the discipline of psychology, researchers tend to take one of two positions (Dawson, 2005). The first regards the incident as essentially homicidal in motive, with a concomitant suicide, perhaps for reasons of remorse. Allen (1983), Berman (1979) and Selkin (1976) fall into this category. The opposing view of the phenomenon proposes it as fundamentally a suicide which in a single, two-stage event, has been extended to the intimate(s) of the perpetrator; for example Palmer and Humphrey (1980), Marzuk et al. (1992), Palermo (1994). Marzuk et al. (1992) propose a taxonomic system for classifying murder suicides based upon a review of the literature from 1966 to 1974. They classify episodes by *Type* (victim-offender relationship) and *Class* (Principal Motive or Precipitating factor). This system of classification has since been adapted by Hanzlick and Koponen (1994) and has provided a basis for comparison of data between studies (Hannah et al., 1998). Sociological investigation of the phenomenon is limited. Silverman and Mukherjee (1987) provide a statistical analysis of homicide data from three Western Canadian cities to expose variables that may be related, but as Stack (1997) notes they mention homicide-suicide only in one brief paragraph. Stack is critical of much existing research because in his view it is methodologically limited due to very small samples, no control groups and because it does not provide ‘any systematic multivariate analysis’ (Stack, 1997:436). Stack undertakes a multivariate logistic regression analysis of 16,245 homicides in Chicago and argues convincingly that the closer the ties between the offender and the victim in homicide, the more likely it is that the offender will subsequently commit suicide. Assuming that offenders may fall into one of the two categories suggested by previous research, Dawson (2005), examining data on 700 intimate femicides in Canada, set out to assess the role of premeditation in cases of intimate femicide followed by suicide. She found that premeditation was more likely to be a factor in cases where the homicidal offender committed suicide, but the degree of premeditation varied according to the type of perpetrator, with the highest degree of premeditation shown in the ill, depressed perpetrator in the extended suicide category.

Men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators in homicide-suicide and yet the homicide-suicide literature so far discussed places no emphasis on the gender of perpetrators. There appears to be little interest in the issue of the relationship between masculinity and homicide-suicide. To find a theoretical position casting light on the relationship between masculinity homicide-suicide, it is necessary to turn to the wider literature on domestic abuse and homicide.

2. Masculinity, homicide and suicide

In the thirty years since Smart (1977) criticised criminology for its failure to consider gender as a relevant analytical category, the relationship between gender and crime has become a key analytical tool for criminologists. Feminists have since the 1970's investigated in particular male violence against women (Brownmiller, 1976; Dobash and Dobash, 1979, 1992; Dobash et al., 2004; Stanko, 1994). Masculinity as an analytical dimension in research on violence has been a key feature of the feminist approach and whilst some of the early work was criticised for being essentialist in nature and equating maleness with crime (Jefferson, 1994), more recent work by feminist and pro-feminist male criminologists has developed a much more sophisticated understanding which speaks of *masculinities*. Using the plural recognises that: 'Specific forms of masculinity are constructed in specific situations, and practices within social settings produce, reproduce and alter types of masculinity' (Messerschmidt, 1993:83).

Connell (1995) has suggested that in any given historical period there is an hegemonic form of masculinity that is socially and culturally prioritised over other, subordinate forms of masculinity. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as: 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees or is taken to guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' Connell (1995:77). Hegemony does not mean total control, however, and Connell cites the work of Paul Willis on young men in a working class secondary school, where 'the lads' construct for themselves an oppositional masculinity challenging the more conventional form encouraged by the school and exemplified by 'the swots' (Willis, 1977). Hegemonic masculinity is supported in the last instance by violence, and the understanding of domestic violence which follows is that it is 'the end game of a range of behaviours designed to intimidate women, from wolf whistling in the street to office harassment' Connell 1995: 83). Violence against women also enables marginalised masculinities, like working class men, to assert their power. As Messerschmidt (1993: 85) puts it 'crime by men is a form of social practice invoked as a resource, when other resources are unavailable, for accomplishing masculinity'. Further, Pringle (1995) notes that while men's violence to women occurs within a structural context of hierarchical power relations, violence is behaviour which men choose. Viewing male violence as a way of accomplishing masculinity in specific circumstances helps us to understand not only the behaviour of working class men who commit the bulk of homicides, but also those incidents involving middle class professional perpetrators. As Hearn (1998:36) notes, men who enjoy 'a range of forms of power and control' may not need to use violence. This links to two further aspects of masculinity theory, which are central to the analysis of male violence. Firstly the importance of bodily experience, which as Connell puts it, is 'often central in memories of our own lives and thus in understanding who and what we are' (1995:53). He argues that through 'body reflexive practices' such as sport, work, sex and illness, 'bodies are addressed by social processes and drawn into history without ceasing to be bodies' (1995:64). These practices are for Connell onto-formative; that is they construct the social world. The ability to perform in certain ways exemplifies gender, so for example a working class man's fit body is an economic asset. The materiality of the body is important; it is not merely a symbol. If the body is impaired by ill health, it diminishes his capacity to accomplish masculinity within the economic sphere. Secondly, the psycho-social dimension aspect of masculinity pays attention to the development of masculine subjectivity. Jefferson (1994, 2002) suggests that Connell pays insufficient attention to the psychological dimension of contemporary masculinity. He argues that it is essential to understand the internal psychological

processes of identity formation which are different for men and women and which often render men deeply psychologically vulnerable when they become involved in an important emotional relationship. When that relationship breaks down men's fear of emotion has been suggested as a factor that contributes to violence (Jakupcak, Tull and Roemer (2005). New (2001:730) goes so far as to suggest that 'the very practices which construct men's capacity to oppress women and interest in doing so, work by systematically harming men.'

Scourfield (2005) uses Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity to begin to provide an explanation for the gendered nature of suicide. (In the UK in 2008, the suicide rate for men was 17.7 per 100,000, compared to 5.4 per 100,000 for women). Drawing on the work of Seidler (1994) Scourfield considers that a contributory factor to men's increased suicidality is emotional illiteracy. Emotional distance is a feature of hegemonic masculinity that helps men to sustain dominance by permitting them to concentrate on competition. The limited range of emotional abilities which result cause men particular difficulties in their relationships with others, especially at profoundly difficult moments like relationship breakdown. Homicide followed by suicide is clearly for Scourfield a way of controlling others in the context of relationship breakdown and he cites the work of Conner et al. (2002) to suggest there is evidence for the view that when a relationship ends, suicide is also used by some men to punish surviving female partners. In common with loss of employment and the experience of mental health problems, relationship breakdown for men causes loss of honour; that is the loss of the favourable standing associated with hegemonic masculinity.

Daly and Wilson (1988) provide an in depth examination of the relationship between masculinity and homicide. Reviewing homicide literature across both time and culture from the perspective of evolutionary psychology they comment that 'intrasexual competition is far more violent among men than among women in every human society for which information exists' (1988:161). Daly and Wilson's position is that control of their female sexual partners and any resulting children is the key to understanding men's homicidal motives. Drawing upon empirical data from their study in Detroit in 1972 and comparing this with other North American studies they conclude that sexual jealousy is the most common motive for homicide when a man kills his female partner. Such jealousy is in many jurisdictions grounds for mitigation in homicide and Daly & Wilson point out that until 1974 in Texas homicide was justifiable in cases where the offender committed it upon 'any person taken in the act of adultery with his wife' (Texas Penal Code, 1925, article 1220, cited in Daly and Wilson, 1988: 195). They further argue that 'familicide — often but by no means always followed by suicide — is a peculiarly male crime' and go on to propose that 'the psychology of familicide must be understood in terms of men's proprietary attitude towards women and their reproductive capacity' (p 83).

Polk also found sexual ownership a key motive in his examination of Australian homicide data between 1985 and 1989. He concluded that 'the use of lethal violence arising out of sexual relationships, for whatever reason, is distinctly a masculine matter' noting that of 102 homicides involving sexual intimates, only 16 were perpetrated by women (Polk, 1994: 56). Of the homicides in which the perpetrator committed suicide in Polk's sample, he found two distinct patterns. The first of these was the pattern of masculine proprietariness outlined by Daly and Wilson, in which the perpetrator, unable to accept the loss of control when his partner is about to leave or has recently left the relationship, kills her and then himself. The second is when the man is very depressed, and having decided that he must end his own life, concludes that he must take his partner with him. The theme of masculine possession is still present in this second pattern, but rather than being motivated by jealousy the behaviour is driven by the man's suicidal impulses and his inability to leave his partner behind.

Examining the relationship between masculinity and child homicide, Adler and Polk (1996) found patterns less easy to identify. Whilst it was clear that men would resort to violence as a solution to a problem, the variety of different scenarios in which the homicides occurred defied ready categorisation. This raised the question of the complexities of the relationship between the ‘complex and sometimes contradictory’ masculinities revealed in the vastly different scenarios they found (Adler and Polk, 1996:409). They did find, in keeping with wider homicide research that most of the perpetrators were white, and either working class or unemployed, and also that in scenarios in which a child had been killed in a rage following some perceived provocative behaviour (like persistent crying or soiling), biological fathers were *not* the perpetrators. Biological fathers, as most homicide-suicide research has found, are more likely to kill their children in the context of a marital breakdown where the female partner leaves or attempts to leave the relationship. The biological fathers who killed children in these circumstances often also killed themselves, either as a form of ‘misguided altruism’ in which they believed the children would be better off dead, or to punish their partner for her perceived misdemeanours.

Using data on 786 men from England, Wales and Scotland, Dobash et al. (2004) compared men who had killed other men with men who had murdered an intimate partner. They were interested in the notion that the intimate partner murderer may be more conventional, that is more like an ordinary man, than the man who murders another man. They found that whilst the intimate partner (IP) group had more childhood problems than the average population, these were fewer than the male murderer (MM) group. Similarly, although all the murderers had more troubled lives than the average adult, the IP group were more conventional in relation to their education, employment and criminal behaviour than their MM counterparts. Across both groups unemployment featured strongly; those who were employed were most likely to have worked in blue-collar jobs but a greater proportion of the IP group (49%) were usually employed compared to 27% of the MM group. The IP group does appear to be more like the ‘ordinary guy’ of Dobash et al.’s title. However, within the IP group they identified two kinds of men: in the first subgroup the men were more likely to have a history of previous abuse of women partners and previous violence against their deceased victim (even though they may not have a criminal record). In the second subgroup the men had murdered their current victim although there had been no previous history of domestic abuse. The theme of male proprietoriness was significant in the IP cases; with jealousy was identified as the cause of the dispute between the couple in 18.8% of cases. In addition one in three of the women had left their partners whilst one in twenty were attempting to do so. In another strand of the same research programme, Cavanagh et al. (2005) found that of 866 men who murdered children within the family a third were found to have killed the child as a response to their partner’s threat to leave the relationship.

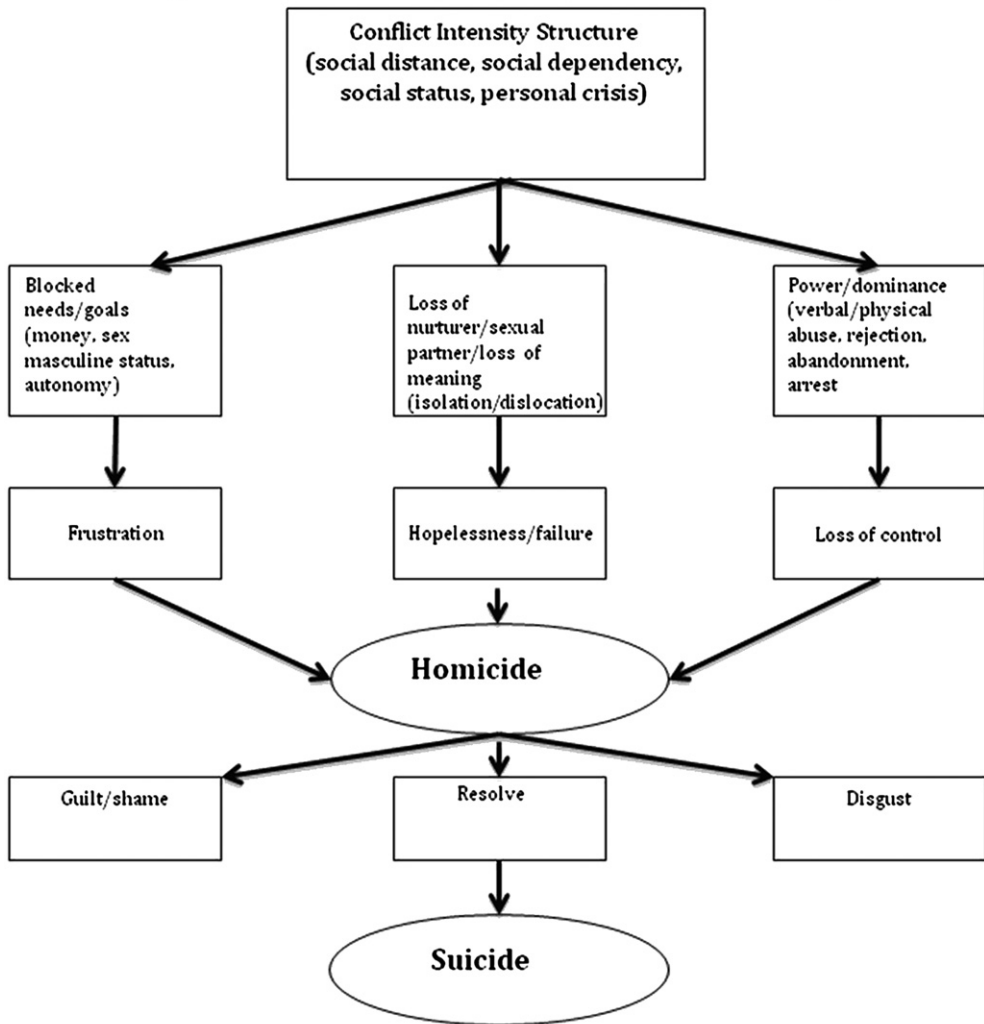
Harper and Voigt (2007) have put forward an integrated theoretical model of homicide-suicide, which goes some way towards addressing the gender dynamics of the phenomenon. The integrated model has as the overarching element of analysis Black’s (2004) *conflict intensity structures*. Black’s premise is that the intensity of violence increases with the degree of emotional involvement between the parties with regard to: (a) the closeness of their relationship; (b) greater dependency upon or responsibility between partners; (c) inequality in the relationship, especially regarding gender; (d) greater previous hostility; (e) the extent of jealousy between the parties. All of the 42 homicide-suicide cases from New Orleans between 1989 and 2001 examined by Harper and Voigt show conflict intensity structures in the relationships between perpetrators and victims. They go on to look at *social stress-strain* (Agnew, 1992).

(This relates to three different types of negative relationships with others: (i) blocked goals (which includes achievement of masculine status) (ii) loss of nurturer or sexual partner (iii) negative stimuli such as verbal or physical abuse, rejection, abandonment or arrest. Harper and Voigt link Agnew's third element of stress-strain with masculinity and the issue of male dominance or proprietoriness identified by [Daly and Wilson \(1988\)](#). All of Harper and Voigt's cases exhibit elements of stress-strain, with control and power-dominance characterising all of the intimate domestic homicide-suicides in their sample. These are 30 of the 42 cases with 29 of the 30 perpetrators being male. Three of the four perpetrators of what Harper and Voigt term 'mercy killings' (2007:306) in which the depressed individual kills the sick and or elderly partner they have been caring for are also male, and these cases exhibit the stress-strain element of loss of nurturer/loss of meaning. Of six 'family annihilators' who kill children and/or partners before committing suicide, four are women, although in keeping with most other studies, three of these kill only their children before committing suicide. The one woman who also kills her husband appears to have done so because he returned home unexpectedly during the episode. The two men who kill their partners and children do so in circumstances of loss of control and masculine status. The intimate partner cases and mercy killing cases accord with Polk's suggested patterns, the first involving masculine proprietoriness and the second, misguided altruism. Masculinity is clearly a key issue in these cases across more than one of the categories proposed because of the gender dynamics of both *conflict intensity structures* and elements of *social stress-strain*. The unequal power relationship which characterises intimate relationships means that the male partner's dominant status is negatively affected by the relationship breaking down and this affects his response to *all* the other elements, which will be illustrated when discussing cases from the current study below.

[Harper and Voigt \(2007\)](#) have made an important contribution to the understanding of homicide-suicide because their integrated theoretical model goes beyond the descriptive typologies so far seen ([Hanzlick and Kopenen, 1994](#); [Hannah et al., 1998](#)) and provides a means of understanding the dynamics of individual homicide-suicide episodes as well as a way of comparing groups of cases to demonstrate patterns. It brings in elements of gender dynamics from both [Black's \(2004\)](#) *conflict intensity structures* and [Agnew's \(1992\)](#) *social stress/strain*. However, its emphasis (see [Fig. 1](#)) with *conflict intensity structures* as the overarching element does not prioritise gender issues sufficiently to address the fact that it is overwhelmingly the men and not the women experiencing conflict and social stress/strain who become homicide-suicide perpetrators. Elements of stress-strain may also be seen within the context of hegemonic masculinity. Loss of masculine status is clearly a loss of the benefits of hegemonic masculinity; loss of nurturer/sexual partner involves loss of control, and rejection and abandonment is a known factor in risk of homicide when intimate relationships breakdown. It is also the case that in this study, conflict intensity with an increased degree of violence linked to the closeness of the relationship is a feature of only two of the cases. What is put forward here is an alternative theoretical position in which hegemonic masculinity (including such issues as male proprietoriness, men's emotional vulnerability, and the fact that violence underpins men's dominant power position) is the basis of the analysis. This theoretical position addresses the fact that men predominate as perpetrators in homicide-suicide, as they do in other forms of both lethal and non-lethal interpersonal violence ([McCarry, 2007](#)). Stress-strain elements seen within the context of hegemonic masculinity are then used to assist our understanding of the contextual and trigger factors contributing to individual episodes and characterise groups of incidents.

In [Harper and Voigt \(2007\)](#) integrated theoretical model, the perpetrator appears to resolve to commit suicide after the homicides. It will be argued here that the findings of the present

An Integrated Theoretical Model of Homicide Followed by Suicide



Harper and Voight (2007)

Fig. 1. An integrated Theoretical Model of Homicide Followed by Suicide.

study appear to suggest that perpetrators have resolved to commit suicide *before* going on to enact the homicide. Clearly the suicide is the last act in the overall event, but what seems to be happening is that his resolve to kill himself provides the perpetrator with what is in effect a *suicidal abrogation*, which frees him to commit the homicide(s) before killing himself. Guilt and shame are sometimes admitted in suicide notes left by the perpetrators but these emotions are expressed not after the fact of the homicide but in terms of what he is about to do. The next section presents the data from the present study, using an understanding of hegemonic masculinity in discussion and analysis.

3. The study

The study covers the period 1993–2007. Data were collected on all episodes of homicide-suicide using initially the records of the Forensic Science Service for Yorkshire and the Humber to identify cases, followed by a detailed examination of Coroners' files throughout the region to compile anonymised case studies. A limitation of this study is its retrospective nature, relying solely on documentary evidence. Any clues as to the motivation of individuals must be gleaned from the opinions of others in statements given after the event, and from any suicide notes or letters left by the deceased.

Homicide followed by suicide is often defined in the literature as homicide(s) followed by the suicide of the perpetrator within one week of the homicide(s) (Campinelli and Thomas 2002; Hannah et al., 1998). Cases were excluded from the study if they did not fall within this definition and in fact all of the suicides took place within the same 24-h period as the homicide. Cases were systematically analysed across a number of key categories drawn from the homicide-suicide and domestic abuse research. These were: age, gender, race/ethnicity, social class, cause of death, victim-perpetrator relationship, alcohol consumption, health status, previous suicide attempts, evidence of threats, previous criminal history and history of domestic abuse. This initial stage of analysis revealed that during the 15-year period there were 30 incidents with a total of 37 homicide victims, averaging 2.0 incidents per year, and comprising 3.1% of all homicides in the region (Gregory and Milroy, 2010). When this is compared to 2.9 incidents per year established in a previous study in this region between 1975 and 1992 (Milroy, 1995), there is a slight decrease overall and a substantial decrease in shooting as the cause of death (from 42% of all victims in cohort one to 14% of all victims in cohort two) which may be attributable to the tightening of gun laws in the UK by the Firearms Amendment (No 2) Act 1997, following the Dunblaine massacre in 1996 (Travis et al., 2007). Twenty-six of the incidents had a single victim, with the remainder having 2 or 3 victims. All of the perpetrators were male and 32 of the 37 victims (86%) were female. Of these, 24 (23 women and 1 man) were the sexual intimates of the perpetrator. The study reveals that homicide-suicide is chiefly a form of intimate partner homicide, and is arguably its most devastating variant. The male perpetrators in this study conform to the profile established by much previous research in that they are mature (the mean age of perpetrators is 43 years), mostly (90%) white, and have most frequently killed their female intimate partner (Barraclough and Harris, 2002; Carcach and Grabosky, 1998; Flynn et al., 2009). In keeping with the Intimate Partner (IP) homicide offenders of Dobash et al's (2004) study, they are conventional in that they are most likely to have been employed (87% were employed at the time of the offence) and have few criminal convictions; (77% had no previous convictions). However, also like the men in Dobash et al's IP group, 57% of these perpetrators had previously physically or sexually abused their partner.

The next stage of analysis was to group the 30 cases into categories based upon significant similar features and to interpret them from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity. (A list of all the case numbers used in the study, some of which are referred to in the text, may be found in Appendix 1.) The categories are as follows:

- *Domestic abuse 1 – intimate partner homicide-suicide (n = 12)*
- *Domestic abuse 2 – family annihilation-suicide (n = 5)*
- *Intimate partner homicide-suicide - no known history of abuse (n = 10)*
- *Non-partner femicide-suicide (n = 2)*
- *Business associate homicide-suicide (n = 1)*

3.1. Domestic abuse 1 – intimate partner homicide-suicide

Cases were identified as domestic abuse cases if there was documentation in the Coroner's file from witness statements, police records, criminal convictions and other documentation that there had been a history of domestic abuse. These cases form the largest group in this study, 17 in total, and for the purposes of discussion have been separated into two sub-groups, those with a single victim, and a smaller group where children as well as partners are victims. There are twelve cases with a single victim who is the intimate partner of the perpetrator and eleven of the twelve partners are female. All twelve perpetrators are male with a mean age of 39 years. Four of the twelve are unemployed and the remainder have manual jobs. Victims are typically younger with a mean age of 31 years, and with one exception, all are female. Seven of the ten victims work, mainly in low status jobs such as retail, factory work and unqualified care work. The youngest victim is a student. There are five common law couples, three separated common law couples, two separated married couples, one married couple and one gay cohabiting couple. Ten of the couples are white, with one black African couple and one mixed race couple, the man African-Caribbean/white and the woman white. Illicit drug use is not found in any perpetrators. Alcohol intoxication is negligible as a finding in either victims or perpetrators, with the exception of case 3/2007 where the perpetrator who kills his 17-year-old male partner has a blood alcohol level of 240mg/100 ml (three times the legal drink drive limit). This contrasts with findings related to homicide more generally. Dobash et al. (2004) found that 38% of male offenders in UK prisons were drunk or very drunk at the time of the offence while 14% were using drugs. Brookman (2005) found that in over half her sample of male homicide offenders, either the victim or perpetrator had consumed alcohol and in a third of cases, both had.

Male proprietoriness is a key feature of these 12 cases, with perpetrators demonstrating the need to control their partners during the relationship, which accords with previous research (Daly and Wilson, 1988; Dobash et al., 2004; Silverman and Mukherjee, 1987). The final breakdown of the relationship is a key triggering factor in the homicide-suicide episode, sometimes at the point the partner is about to leave, and sometimes after a period of separation, a factor well documented in domestic abuse literature (Block, 2000; Campbell, 1992; Carcach and Grabosky, 1998; Johnson and Hotton, 2003). Four couples had been separated for some time but in each case the situation was characterised by ongoing hostility caused by the man's sexual possessiveness and need to control his partner's life. Evidence of domestic abuse was documented in all 12 cases and while previous convictions are not always available in Coroners' records, there are indications of previous criminal histories for seven of the twelve IPH perpetrators. In addition to cases 2/2001 and 3/2007, where some of the criminal convictions were directly related to the domestic abuse, a further five perpetrators had previous convictions. In two cases these were for violence, though it is not clear if these were against an intimate partner. In seven of the twelve cases, the pattern of domestic abuse was also documented in previous relationships. In case 1/1999, the perpetrator's former partner describes his extreme jealousy about her working, the numerous injuries she sustained and how he threatened and harassed her and her new partner when she finally got away from him. In case 1/2007 the perpetrator's ex girlfriend tells police that he gave her HIV, broke her arm when she tried to leave him and threatened to kill her. Four of these twelve perpetrators did not have a previous criminal record, which accords with Dobash et al's (2004) finding that some of their IP group whilst appearing 'conventional' in not having a criminal record, did have a history of domestic abuse against previous partners. The 'conventionality' of these perpetrators is also in keeping with the findings of Adler and Polk (1996) and Dobash et al. (2004) in that all twelve

perpetrators had been in skilled or unskilled manual occupations, although five of them were unemployed at the time of the incident, reflecting perhaps a marginalised masculinity, which finds alternative expression in dominating in the domestic sphere (Messerschmidt, 1993).

There are indications from the documentation relating to all these cases of a strong emotional attachment, so strong that the perpetrator would rather die than live without the loved one. The emotional vulnerability of men within personal relationships suggested by Jefferson (1994) is relevant here in explaining why it is the men not the women who become perpetrators. In addition it is very likely that the deep emotional bond is inextricably linked with the need to control the partner and the anger that ensues when his control is challenged. Inequality is also a factor in all these cases, but the inequality within relationships characterised by domestic abuse is a particularly gendered inequality.

As noted, excessive violence is not a widespread characteristic of these cases. Of the twelve victims, two are killed by a single gunshot wound and five by asphyxiation; three are stabbed, of which one could be regarded as overkill, with 64 separate wounds. The remaining two victims receive excessive injuries, one of whom has multiple injuries including stabbing, strangulation and blunt trauma, and the second is doused in petrol and set alight.

Various elements of strain – loss of masculine status, loss of sexual partner and abandonment – are evident within these cases, and these elements may be viewed within the context of hegemonic masculinity. For each of these men, the performance of masculinity has become bound up with his ability to be in full charge of his partner. This has been maintained by the use of violence during the relationship, and now as he begins to lose control and lose masculine status, the violence escalates towards homicide (Sev'er 1997). In six cases the homicide-suicide occurred at the point when the partner was about to leave the relationship. An example is case 3/2007. In this instance the victim was a 17-year-old boy who had been involved in a relationship with the 55-year-old perpetrator for the past year, very much against the wishes of the boy's family. The boy had indicated to Social Services that he was willingly involved in the relationship, but at the time of the incident he had indicated to his family that he was planning to leave his partner and return to live at home. It was the impending departure of his lover for whom the perpetrator had left his marriage that triggered the episode in which he repeatedly stabbed the boy to death and then killed himself by driving his car headlong into an oncoming lorry. In addition to the final trigger of the boy's impending departure, elements of stress-strain were strong in this case because of the disapprobation attached to the relationship. The couple had been investigated by Social Services, pursued by police at the behest of the boy's family when they left the country, and the perpetrator's wife had divorced him. This perpetrator had given up his former conventional family life and there was desperation evident in the degree of attachment he expressed about the boy. He told a friend in a telephone conversation shortly before the episode that 'if he leaves I will have nothing left'.

Mental ill health is documented in six of these twelve cases and this appears to contribute to the perpetrator's inability to cope with the complex range of factors contributing to each situation. In addition, previous suicide attempts are recorded in cases 4/1993, 3/2001 and 2/2007. Joiner (2005), reviewing a number of clinical studies, suggests that previous suicide attempts increase the likelihood of a future completed suicide and should be regarded as an indicator of risk of suicide.

3.2. *Domestic abuse 2 – family annihilation*

Of the five *family annihilation* cases there are three in which the perpetrator kills the children of the family before committing suicide one in which he kills his partner and their

children before killing himself, and one in which he kills their child and attempts to kill his partner before killing himself. The five perpetrators are male with a mean age of 46 years. The two adult victims are considerably younger, both 33, and both female. There are seven female child victims aged between 2 and 9, mean age 5. There are three male child victims aged 13, 7 and 3. Four of the five perpetrators are in work at the time of the episode, two are chefs, one is a foreman joiner and one a GP. The remaining perpetrator is an engineer, retired on health grounds. The two adult female victims are a barmaid and a pub licensee. There are three married couples, two of which are separated and two common law couples, both separated. Four of the five couples are white, and one is mixed race with an Asian man and white woman. Neither illicit drug use nor alcohol intoxication is found in victims or perpetrators.

All five *family annihilation* cases are characterised by a history of domestic abuse with the perpetrators expressing extreme possessiveness towards their partners, again suggesting power and control issues, which in this case encompass the children as well. When this ability to control diminishes on separation the men exhibit anxiety, depression and anger. At the time of the killings, four of the five women were living apart from the perpetrator, and in two of the cases where the children alone were killed; the couple were in dispute about the perpetrator's contact with the children. The children in these families had not been abused before, although the perpetrator in case 2/1994 had sexually assaulted an older daughter from a previous relationship and in case 1/1999 the perpetrator, who suffered from long-term mental health problems, had previously made threats to kill his son. At the time of the incident the woman was still living with her husband and he had expressed the delusional belief that she was having an extra-marital affair. When he killed their son and attacked her, leaving her for dead before killing himself, he left a forged note purporting to be from her saying that she would never be intimate with another man after his death.

In the *family annihilation* cases where the children alone are killed, documentary evidence indicates that the perpetrator's anger is directed at the partner, suggesting that the motive for the homicide is the perpetrator's desire to punish her, and the children provide him with the greatest weapon with which to hurt her. This accords with a pattern identified by Adler and Polk (1996) within their sample of child homicides. A sort of misguided altruism akin to another grouping within Adler and Polk's child killers emerges in some of the *family annihilation* cases, for example when the perpetrator in case 2/1994 in a telephone call to their mother, says: '[the girls] are asleep now and are at peace with me' as though by killing his daughters and himself he somehow sees death as a better future for them all. Perhaps linked to these sentiments this same perpetrator uses one of the more passive methods of killing, carbon monoxide poisoning.

In all five *family annihilation* cases the threat (imagined in one case) of another man becoming intimate with his partner and having contact with their children is a key precipitating factor, indicating in keeping with Daly & Wilson's (1988) findings that male proprietoriness includes both partners and children. The perpetrator in case 1/1998 who strangled his partner and smothered their son and daughter 7 and 10, left a note by his partner's body addressed to the new man in her life: 'fuck off you Irish bastard you are not getting my Jenny or my kids.' In case 2/1994 where the man killed the couple's three daughters and himself he left a note which said: 'I will not have any other person acting as dad to my girls' (Underlining original). Whilst these two perpetrators both used passive methods to kill their children, in the remaining three cases the anger directed at partners appears to spill over on to the children who are killed in much more brutal ways. In cases 3/1994 and 2/1999 the children are all strangled with ligatures. In case 1/2004 two girls aged 4 and 2 and their mother are all killed with multiple stab wounds.

Inexplicably, the perpetrator leaves the youngest child of the family, a baby of 13 months alive in the car when he leaps from a nearby bridge.

Elements of social stress/strain can be seen in all the *family annihilation* cases in the build up to the homicide-suicide episode. In three cases there were impending court proceedings; contact disputes in the family courts in two cases, and a pending criminal prosecution in a third.

Two of the five perpetrators had a previous criminal record, one included affray and the other sexual assault against a child. All five of the *family annihilation* perpetrators were usually in full time employment in respectable skilled or professional work. However, three of them had lost their jobs and in two of the cases (case 1/2004 and case 3/1994) the loss of job was directly linked to the marital breakdown. The third (case 2/1999) lost his job through mental ill health. Long-term mental ill health was a strong additional element of stress/strain in case 2/1999, and there was ongoing involvement from psychiatric services. In addition the perpetrators in cases 1/2004 and 3/1994 had been treated for anxiety and depression by their GPs in the previous twelve months.

Although anger towards the woman is a common factor, there is nothing sudden about these episodes. Threats had been made in all of the cases, sometimes directly to the woman and sometimes to family members, friends or involved professionals. It appears that the threats were not taken seriously enough or were made too late for action to be taken. In case 2/1999 the professionals involved regarded previous threats to the son's life no longer serious or current. Evidence of a considerable degree of planning is evident in each of the episodes, with elements such as leaving a note and/or a will; ensuring no other people would be around at the time of the offence; procuring weapons; making arrangements to have the children alone and in one case making a video of the children saying how much they loved daddy before killing them. These men are angry but resolved and the degree of planning suggests they had decided to kill themselves prior to the homicides. That decision abrogates — at least in their own minds - any responsibility they have to the law or society and frees them to kill other family members either punitively or with the misguidedly altruistic notion of 'taking them with me.' An important element of this single, two-stage act is a symbolic regaining of the power they have lost through their marital breakdown, loss of emotional stability and other catastrophic life events.

3.3. *Intimate partner homicide-suicide (no history of abuse)*

All ten perpetrators in this group are male with a mean age of 46 years. Five of the group are manual workers; three are non-manual including a company director. One is retired and one unemployed. Victims are typically younger with a mean age of 39 years all are female. One victim is retired, and eight work in low status jobs including clerical, retail and factory work. One is a company director (she and her husband ran their own small company). There are four married couples, three separated married couples, one common law couple, one separated common law couple, and one young couple formerly involved in a non-cohabiting relationship. All ten couples in this group are white. Illicit drug use is not found in any perpetrators. Alcohol intoxication is not significant in these cases with only one perpetrator being slightly over the drink drive limit. These ten cases reflect Dobash et al's (2004) findings that their IP group tended to be more conventional in that they were more often gainfully employed than the 'ordinary' killers. Also similarly to Dobash et al's (2004) IP group, these men had neither criminal records nor a history of violence in their intimate relationships. This leads to the very sobering conclusion that some men with no previous criminal record and no documented history of violence can, when triggered by what is for them an unbearable emotional upset, use

lethal violence. In nine of these cases the triggering event is the woman attempting to leave the relationship, a factor in common with other cases in this study and with the findings of previous research (Block, 2000; Campbell, 1992; Johnson and Hotton, 2003). The importance of the domestic arena for the performance of masculinity seems relevant again here, particularly as most perpetrators work in low status jobs. For the one company director, who may not have been so dependent upon the domestic sphere for the performance of masculinity, his work status was also under threat due to his wife leaving, because they ran the company together. Life cannot be contemplated without the partner, exemplified in his suicide note: *'I put my whole love and devotion into caring for her in every conceivable way. My life is now worth nothing because there is nothing left to look forward to.'*

Excessive violence is apparent in only one case, no 4/1994, where a 77-year-old perpetrator kills his 72-year-old wife with multiple hammer blows. The other methods are asphyxiation (5), stabbing (2), car collision (1) and gunshot wounds (1). Male proprietoriness is exemplified by the jealousy characterising six of the nine cases, aroused by the woman finding a new partner. Case 2/1995, whose wife was about to leave him following the second extra-marital affair she had engaged in during the marriage, indicates his feelings as follows: *'Life is nothing without her. I can't have her stolen from me again.'*

Again in this group of cases, the resolve to commit suicide appears to precede the homicidal intent.

Elements of stress/strain attendant upon the relationship breakdown are evident in all the cases, in particular the issue of the marital home and how this is to be allocated. In case 2/1993 the perpetrator says in his suicide note: *'The question of the house problem will not be as easy as it first looks and I have a distinct feeling that I would not be able to have a share of it in the end.'*

Case 4/1994 involved an elderly couple with no suggestion that the woman was planning to leave her husband. He had become depressed, and reflecting Polk's (1996) second pattern of masculine possession within intimate partner homicides, had decided that he must take his wife with him. None of these men apparently felt the need to use violence to retain control over their partners in any way that became documented during the course of the relationship. However, given the threat of its impending collapse, or in one case the onset of anxiety and depression they resort to violence which is the ultimate sanction underpinning hegemonic masculinity in our society.

3.4. *Non-partner femicide-suicide*

These two cases reflect masculine possession and loss of control issues but the female victims are not the sexual partners of the perpetrators. The first of these, case 3/2002, involves a 55-year-old man who had cared for his 79 year old invalid mother for a number of years. Family reported that she had not left her bedroom for a very long time and the post-mortem examination showed untreated bedsores. Elements of stress/strain seem to have occurred when the son developed a serious ulcer on his leg requiring hospital treatment. Rather than face the possibility of intervention from the authorities ensuing from his admission, the perpetrator asphyxiated his mother, then himself, with plastic bags. What was interesting about this case was the treatment it received in the local press who described the killing as a 'last act of mercy from a loving son', despite an inquest verdict on the mother of unlawful killing and evidence suggesting serious neglect at the very least.

The second case, no 5/1994, contains all the elements of sexual possessiveness characterising the domestic abuse cases but in this instance the man had been trying to achieve a sexual

relationship with a woman with whom he had had a casual friendship for the past five years. His sexual advances had always been rebuffed, but as he got more persistent and she got more frightened, she told him to leave her alone completely and refused to see him at all. This final rejection and the prospect of loss of all contact is what appears to have triggered the incident in which he shot her then himself at their local public house.

3.5. *Business associate homicide-suicide*

The final case of the 30 (1/1995), is the only one not containing either elements of sexual possessiveness or any form of domestic relationship between perpetrator and victim. It involves two men who were partners in a small business. The perpetrator had recently separated from his wife and they were involved in an acrimonious divorce. In his suicide notes he reveals that he felt let down by his wife and friends as well as by his business partner who he blamed for the failure of the business: '*[the victim] is about to throw me away like an old sock now that there is little money left.*' The loss of marriage and loss of business appear to have become linked in his way of thinking and both may be seen as elements of stress/strain, and for him the loss of positive ways of performing masculinity in the domestic and economic spheres. This was the context of the incident in which he shot his business partner and then himself. There is clear evidence of planning in this case where the perpetrator who had never owned a gun before, joined a local gun club and obtained a shotgun licence in order to gain possession of the weapon with which he shot his partner. Again, the resolve to kill himself in the face of the loss of his marriage and his business, abrogated him from continuing to behave in the law-abiding way he had done hitherto, and freed him to kill his partner before taking his own life.

4. Conclusion

Whilst Harper and Voight (2007) have provided a useful contribution to our understanding of homicide-suicide with their integrated theoretical model, an understanding placing greater emphasis on hegemonic masculinity avoids McCarr's criticism: 'despite the fact that men are the main perpetrators of interpersonal violence many conceptual models for explaining violence do not have a focus on the gender dynamics of interpersonal violence' (2007: 404).

The sample of homicide-suicide cases discussed here confirms previous findings that it is nearly always men who are the perpetrators in these events, with women and children overwhelmingly the victims (Easteal, 1993; Barraclough and Harris, 2002; Flynn et al., 2009; Le Comte and Fornes, 1998). It has been argued that it is the context of hegemonic masculinity in which the ultimate threat of violence sustains men's position of power and underpins the unequal gender dynamics in intimate relationships. It is the loss of the benefits of hegemonic masculinity, coupled with men's relative emotional illiteracy, which explains men's predominance as perpetrators. Elements of *social stress-strain* (loss of masculine status, removal of valued stimuli and presentation of negative stimuli) have therefore been discussed with hegemonic masculinity as the overarching framework.

Domestic abuse is known to be a significant factor in 17 of the 30 cases presented and key features of these cases reflect the findings of research on domestic abuse more widely in that the woman leaving the relationship is the trigger for the escalation of violence (Block, 2000; Campbell, 1992; Johnson and Hotton, 2003). The overwhelming majority of suicidal

homicide offenders display elements of male proprietoriness in their response to relationship breakdown. The anger that is often associated with male violence is clearly evident in some of the cases whilst others display tendencies towards ‘misguided altruism’. Whilst society condemns this behaviour, there is some societal support for the male violence that underpins masculinity. This may be seen in the fact that we require men to be aggressive, and even lethally violent in the service of the armed forces (Hearn, 1998). Women’s contribution to armed services throughout history has been much more limited and is subject to restrictions about involvement in front line warfare (Seagal, 1995). Public attitudes to male violence more generally are also ambivalent and this is revealed in research on domestic abuse and rape where women are viewed by perpetrators and others as somehow to blame as victims. The man’s violence is justified as a response to the woman’s behaviour (Dobash et al., 1979, 1992; Hearn, 1998). This is particularly evident in the way that the defence of provocation has been used to justify the verdict of manslaughter for male defendants (Daly and Wilson, 1988). This is part of a context where male violence is often normalised making it more likely that men will resort to violence to accomplish masculinity when other more appropriate opportunities appear to them to have closed down.

This study supports the findings of previous research (Hanzlick and Copenen 1994; Feltous and Hempel, 1995; Milroy, 1995) that perpetrators in homicide-suicide episodes are older than the typical 28-year-old homicide offender (Brookman, 2005). Viewing them from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity helps identify some of the relationship factors that combine to create the conditions for homicide followed by suicide, rather than homicide alone. This suggests that these mature perpetrators may feel they have a great deal of responsibility for partners, children, homes, work lives and finances, and thus a great deal to lose when relationships breakdown.

The findings from this small sample are in accord with the views of Jefferson (1994, 2002) and Scourfield (2005), suggesting that men are rendered emotionally vulnerable when engaging in close emotional relationships with women and children, causing a direct conflict with the strength and self reliance called upon by the hegemonic masculinity to which many men feel they must conform. There is evidence throughout these cases that this vulnerability is so feared and dreaded that the perpetrator would rather die than face the painful recognition of his own emotional vulnerability when it is exposed by the loss or impending loss of his partner.

Much of what has already been discussed also applies to non-lethal domestic abuse and to domestic homicide not followed by suicide. The case analysis using hegemonic masculinity to interpret elements of social stress/strain reveals the kinds of factors that combine to create a homicide-suicide episode. The depth of attachment to partners is strongly evident in all the intimate partner cases, whether or not there has been a pattern of domestic abuse, and it has been argued that the depth of attachment should be seen within the context of the control the perpetrator has felt the need to exert during the relationship. The fact that the excessive use of violence found in some previous studies (Wolfgang, 1958; Harper and Voight, 2007) does not feature in very many of these cases suggests that future research might valuably focus upon cultural differences in relation to use of force, as well as availability of weapons. As noted, this study shows that there has been a reduction in the use of firearms since the last Yorkshire and the Humber research (Travis et al., 2007).

The *family annihilation* group particularly features impending court proceedings as negative stimuli and there is something to learn here about the risks to families undergoing stressful contested family court proceedings. Mental ill health and evidence of previous suicide attempts

are issues in a number of the *intimate partner homicide-suicide* group. Fears a about loss of home and financial security are also issues which feature throughout the cases, but particularly in the *intimate partner homicide-suicide* group, and the *business associate homicide-suicide* case.

It has also been argued here that most homicide-suicide events involve the resolve to commit suicide *before* the homicide takes place. This appears to be the sequence of events in these 30 cases. Under the kinds of pressures outlined, the perpetrator resolves that suicide is the only way out. Sometimes, the elderly partner (or mother in one case) is then killed because he cannot bear to leave her behind (misguided altruism), but in most of the cases where the intimate partner is killed, the homicide appears to be to punish that person. The *family annihilation* cases combine these motives. Here, the perpetrator punishes the woman when he kills her together with their children. He also punishes her if he kills only the children, and exhibits misguided altruism when he believes that he is taking the children with him. As he begins to feel that he is losing control, the decision to commit suicide is for him a step towards regaining that control. That resolution to kill himself provides him with a sort of 'suicidal abrogation' in which he is freed to kill the objects of his distress knowing that he is also going to put an end to his own misery. The notion of 'suicidal abrogation' is important because it helps to contextualise not only those cases in which violence has been a persistent feature, but also helps to explain the behaviour of those perpetrators who do not have a history of previous violence. In the first case, suicidal abrogation means he is free to escalate the violence he has been accustomed to using, knowing that he cannot be brought to justice. In the second, suicidal abrogation means that as the important relationships in his life have broken down, the choice of suicide releases him from the constraints of law or others' disapprobation and enables him to punish those who have hurt him, or misguidedly seek to take his loved ones with him. Perhaps the most stark display of suicidal abrogation may be seen in the behaviour of 'spree' killers who then commit suicide, sometimes by presenting themselves to the police to be shot, referred to in the literature as 'suicide by cop' (Harper and Voight, 2007 p 308). Michael Ryan, who shot and killed 16 people including his mother on August 19, 1987, drove and then walked quite calmly through the streets of Hungerford for 2 h before killing himself at a local primary school which was then closed for the summer holiday (Josephs, 1993). More recently on 2 June 2010, Derek Bird shot dead 12 people and injured 25 others in the town of Whitehaven, Cumbria, over a period of 5 h from 8.30 am, before shooting himself (Seabrook, 2010). In the knowledge of their intention to kill themselves, these spree killers show no fear of apprehension or punishment but quite calmly pursue their violent intentions in full view of members of the public including in both cases friends and neighbours. Suicidal abrogation is a powerful source of licence for homicide-suicide perpetrators whether they be spree killers or domestic killers like those in this study. A settled intention to commit suicide frees the perpetrator to plan and carry out the homicide(s) in the sure knowledge that the only person he is answerable to is himself.

As noted, this study is limited by its retrospective nature. Further research in Yorkshire and the Humber is planned which it is hoped will contribute some knowledge to the issue of motivation. This will involve interviews with life sentence prisoners who have committed homicide(s) and then attempted suicide but survived. In this way some light may be cast upon the perpetrator's feelings and decision-making processes as he finds himself in a deeply challenging life crisis. It is hoped that it will then be possible to make a further contribution to the debate about the complexity of the relationship between masculinity and violence and perhaps to add to the growing understanding of risk of harm in families who are undergoing relationship breakdown.

Appendix 1

List of case numbers.

Domestic Abuse 1: Intimate Partner Homicide-Suicide (IPH) Cases with a known history of domestic abuse. Single victim.

Case No	Perpetrator	Victim(s)	Cause of death perpetrator	Cause of death victim(s)
4/1993	Male	Female	Hanging	Strangulation
1/1996	Male	Female	Hanging	Compression of neck
1/1999	Male	Female	shooting	Shooting
3/1999	Male	Female	Hanging	Compression of neck
2/2001	Male	Female	Burning	Burning
3/2001	Male	Female	Hanging	Strangulation
1/2002	Male	Female	Drowning	Stabbing
1/2006	Male	Female	Heart attack; drug overdose	Multiple injuries
2/2006	Male	Female	Hanging	Stabbing
1/2007	Male	Female	Incised wounds of upper limbs	Compression of neck
2/2007	Male	Female	Hanging	Strangulation
3/2007	Male	Male	Multiple injuries	Stabbing and strangulation
Domestic Abuse 2: Family annihilation. Cases with a known history of domestic abuse. Multiple victims				
2/1994	Male	Female (3)	Car exhaust fumes	Car exhaust fumes
3/1994	Male	Male (1)	Fall from height	Strangulation
1/1998	Male	Female	Car exhaust fumes	Strangulation
		Female		Smothering
		Male		Smothering
2/1999	Male	Female	Hanging	Blunt head injuries but survived
1/2004	Male	Male	Fall from height	Strangulation
		Female (3)		Stabbing
Intimate partner homicide-suicide (no documented history of abuse)				
1/1993	Male	Female	Hanging	Compression of neck
2/1993	Male	Female	Hanging	Stabbed
3/1993	Male	Female	Multiple Injuries	Multiple Injuries
1/1994	Male	Female	Car exhaust fumes	Strangulation
4/1994	Male	Female	Drowning	Blunt head trauma
2/1995	Male	Female	Shooting	Shooting
3/1995	Male	Female	Carbon monoxide poisoning	Blunt head trauma
1/2001	Male	Female	Drug overdose	Strangulation
2/2002	Male	Female	Hanging	Strangulation
1/2005	Male	Female	Shooting	Shooting
Non-partner femicide-suicide				
5/1994	Male	Female	Shooting	Shooting
3/2004	Male	Female	Plastic bag asphyxia	Plastic bag asphyxia
Business associate homicide-suicide				
1/1995	Male	Male	Shooting	Shooting

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