Spousal Homicides in Contemporary Greece

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ABSTRACT

This study has explored patterns and motives of spousal homicide in Greece. The data were obtained from an availability sample of 62 cases of spousal homicides published in daily Greek newspapers which record spousal killings in all of Greece.

The findings suggest that spousal homicide in Greece is manifested in certain patterns of occupational status, gender, age, place of occurrence, method of inflicting death and occurrence of suicide-homicide. The data also tend to support the argument that in spousal homicides the predominant issues are real or imagined sexual infidelity, jealousy and coercive control of the spouse. Patterns and motives of such homicides are generally similar to those reported in other industrial societies, especially Canada and the United States.

Introduction

A REVIEW OF the criminological literature indicates that research dealing with spousal homicides in contemporary Greece is limited. The available studies on criminal homicides in Greece (Christodoulou, 1966; Safilios-Rothschild, 1969; Chimbos, 1993) give only limited reference to spousal killings which constitute approximately 15% of all criminal homicides in Greece. Thus, the objective of this study was to explore demographic variables and patterns of spousal homicide in Greece and when possible compare the findings with those of other countries such as Canada and the U.S.A. Spousal homicide refers to the intentional killing of one spouse (registered or common-law) by another. Our data include premeditated spouse killing (killing after planning or deliberation) and unpremeditated homicide (killing committed in the heat of passion or sudden marital quarrel). More specifically, the study attempted to answer the following questions: (a) Are there any associations with the occupational status of offenders and victim? (b) Is the risk of spousal

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homicide a function of the victim's age? (c) Is there a relationship between the place of the fatal assault sustained and the gender of the victim? (d) Is there a relationship between incidence of homicide-suicide (e.g., committing suicide after killing a spouse) and gender of offender? (e) Do methods of inflicting death on a spouse vary by gender of offender? (f) Do motives for killing a spouse vary by gender of offender?

Data Gathering Method

The main sources for collecting data on spousal homicides in Greece from August 1, 1986 to July 30, 1991 were the Greek daily newspapers *Ethnos* and *Nea* which report, *inter alia*, criminal homicides from all Greece. Crime reporters of these daily newspapers present information on the offender's and victim's age, gender, occupational status, place of homicidal assault, method of inflicting death and the alleged motives for the lethal attack given by offenders. Crime reporters obtain their information from police investigators, relatives or friends of victims and offenders, and even from arrested suspects who were willing to give an account of the homicide to crime reporters.

A codified data collection schedule in which information from daily newspapers was transferred had been formulated to facilitate tabulation. Some cases of spousal killings committed during the data collection period could have been missed by the journalists or researchers. However, the number of missed cases is relatively small (approximately 20%) and should not be considered a serious limitation to the study. Our availability sample consisted of 62 cases of spousal homicides including 49 female and 13 male victims. Three of the 62 cases of spousal homicides involved multiple victim cases. In one case a 51-year old father killed his estranged wife and their 19-year old son before taking his own life. The second case involved a 79-year old man who killed his 76-year old wife and their 52-year old daughter. The third case involved a 36-year old husband who killed his wife, along with his 60-year old mother-in-law and 47-year old brother-in-law. Five (8%) of the 62 victims in our sample were in common-law relationships. All five were females.

Findings

Occupational Status

One of the most striking findings in criminological studies is that rates of criminal homicides are considerably higher among groups from the lower socioeconomic classes (Wolfgang, 1958; Pittman and Handy, 1964; Munford et al., 1976; Chimbos, 1993). As Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1969:260) indicate, social class, whatever the