Expressive Partner Homicides in Spain: Differences according to Agressors Sex

Miguel Angel Soria1*, Laura Pajon2, Alba Company1, Mireia Lopez2 and Montse Lebron1

1University of Barcelona, Av. Diagonal, 684, 08028, Barcelona, Spain
2University of Derby, Friar Gate Square, Derby Campus, Derby, Derbyshire, UK

*Corresponding author: Miguel Angel Soria, Faculty of Psychology, Department of Social Psychology, University of Barcelona, Passeig Vall d’Hebron, 171, 08035, Barcelona, Spain, Tel: 34635622673; E-mail: msoria@ub.edu

Received date: April 20, 2016; Accepted date: June 20, 2016; Published date: June 27, 2016

Abstract

Introduction: Although the important concert about partner homicides, there are no scientific studies in Spain. The main aim of this study is to analyze differences in Spanish partner homicides between aggressor’s sex with a) crime perpetration: attempted or completed and b) criminal process: pre-crime, offence and post-crime behavior.

Method: We used Basa Data “Protocolo de Análisis del Crimen Violento en Homicidios Familiares”, composed by firmed sentences of family homicides in Spain. Specifically, we analyzed a sample of 323 partner homicide firmed sentences, mostly men.

Results: The results show that attempted crimes are more associated with men, and completed homicides with women. Regarding pre-crime behaviors, the existence of previous conflict and previous break up are more associated with men. In criminal context, instrumental behaviors are more related with women while expressive behaviors don’t show relation with aggressor’s sex; to strangle the victim is more associated with women. Finally, none of post-criminal behaviors show relation with aggressor’s sex.

Discussion: The results regarding pre-crime and post-crime behaviors are consistent with precedents studies in other countries, also the predominance of expressive behaviors in both, men and women. Concerning to crime perpetration, it hasn’t been found previous studies comparing it with offender’s sex in partner homicides.

Keywords: Expressive violence; Instrumental violence; Homicide against the couple; Spain; Criminal behavior

Introduction

Domestic violence is defined as the type violent and no-accidental action that implies the physical and/or psychological damage of a family member. The emotional attachment that exists in the relationship between victim and aggressor makes to consider domestic violence as a unique type of violence [1,2]. Domestic violence covers a wide range of types of violence but domestic homicide is the most serious one and, regarding to intimate partners, homicide is the most common type of domestic homicide [3].

It has been considered that in partner homicides, expressive violence is frequently involved. Terms as expressive and instrumental violence have existed in the criminological literature since seventies and they have been largely defined by authors. Expressive violence is characterized by the lack of control, impulsivity, strong emotional feelings, irrationality and lack of premeditation [4].

The individual, as a result of psychological and external stressors such as anger, negative moods, fury or irritation, would experience states of tension and physical activation and in turn, these emotional and psychological states would be externalized as physical and brutal attacks towards the victim [5-9].

Therefore, in expressive violence, the closer the victim and the offender are, the higher the level of expressiveness will be involved in the offence [5,9-13]. Because of physical contact and direct contact with the victim are key elements of expressive violence [4,14,15] it has been considered that expressive violence is the most predominant type of violence observed in partner homicides.

On the contrary, instrumental violence is planned, structured, controlled and non-emotional. The objective of the aggressor is not the victim but something that can be gotten from the victim (e.g. sex, properties, money, etc.).

Nonetheless, as some authors have pointed out neither expressive violence, necessary exclude instrumental violence, nor instrumental violence necessary excludes expressive violence. Instead, both types of violence can occur in the same crime and in the same violent aggression, although expressive violence is more prevalent in partner homicides [7,16,17]. This predominance of expressive rather than instrumental violence, and therefore the increase of impulsiveness, irrationality and spontaneity reduce both the rational and the decision-making process that offend does when committing the crime [18-28].

Previous investigations have observed that males and females differ in aggressive behaviors being males more predisposed to aggressive behaviors than females. It has been suggested that this is due to sex differences in inhibitory control capacity and in their management of the arousal levels. The arousal levels in which males would express feelings of anger would be lower than the ones under which women would express those feelings. Furthermore, pre-criminal conditions and situations that precipitate the crime are also different between males and females. Whereas in the case of males previous break-ups, separation or feelings of losing someone they used to love can...
precipitate the crime [29,30], in the case of females, those condition do
not usually appear but instead it is frequent that they have a previous
history of partner abuse or mental health problems [25,31-33].

Previous investigations have helped to increase the understanding of
partner homicide in a scientific way, nonetheless, little is known about
this crime in the Spanish context, which, due to different ecological
factors results from previous investigations could not be fully
extrapolated to the Spanish reality. Official Spanish data exposes that
most of the victims of this type of crime are married women who live
with their husband, nonetheless little is known of the offender.

This lack of awareness in the Spanish context is not only due to the
scarce official data gathered but also because of the lack of studies
conducted in Spain examining it. The present investigation aims to
palliate this research gap by examining partner homicides in the
Spanish context. In order to get this aim, the study is going to examine
expressive and instrumental violence as well as the behaviors
performed in all three stages of the crime: pre-criminal behaviors,
criminal behaviors and post-criminal behaviors.

Furthermore, the study will examine if any of the behaviors studied
are associated to a specific gender. Taking previous research into
consideration it is hypothesized that: 1. Expressive behaviors will be
related to male aggressors while instrumental behaviors will be related
to female aggressors, 2. Regarding pre-criminal behavior previous
conflicts, previous breaks-up and previous violence and/or threats will
appear in the case of males, 3. Regarding criminal behavior scab
wounds and blunt objects will appear in both sexes. Nonetheless,
instrumental behaviors are expected to be more predominant in the
case of females and expressive behaviors in the case of males.

Method

Sample

Data was collected from the Spanish Judicial Base Data (CENDOJ). The
Base Data gathers a total number of 517 family homicides firm
sentences in Spain from 2000 to 2010. We considered as partner
homicides those cases in which victim and offender have or have had a
sentimental relationship. Following this criterion, three hundred and
twenty-three (N=323) cases out of the total sample were considered as
partner homicides.

Instrument

In order to conduct the study it was used the "Protocolo de Analisis
del Crimen Violento en Homicidios Familiares" (PACVHF) [34]. This
is a 96-item questionnaire that gathers information from family
homicides committed in Spain. It covers seven thematic groups: 1.
Criminal justice information; 2. Social, familiar, personal and medical
information about both victim and aggressor; 3. Criminal event
variables (i.e., chronology, geography, methods of approximation); 4.
Criminal scene variables (i.e., victim's body position, victim's personal
objects, cause of death, injuries, sexual activity and weapon); 5.
Witnesses' information; 6. Forensic evidences and 7. Penal
consequences.

Procedure

In order to analyze the expressiveness of partner homicides we
selected those variables that according to previous research refer to
expressive and instrumental violence [11,13,15,25,35-38]. According to
literature, those variables considered as expressive (previous threats/
violence, previous break-up, previous conflict, asphyfiation, scab
wounds, gunshot, blunt object, suicide, turn himself to the police) were
group together and codified as “Expressive violence”, alike those
variables considered by previous research as instrumental
(strangulation, burns and intoxication) which were group together and
codified as “Instrumental violence”.

Furthermore, in order to examine the sex difference in all three
stages of the crime the following variables were selected and classified
in three main groups in order to be studied independently. The three
main groups were: 1. Pre-criminal behavior, 2. Criminal behavior and
3. Post-criminal behavior. Pre-criminal behavior gathers those
behaviors conducted before the crime, three of them were considered
for the study: previous threats/violence, previous break-up and
previous conflict.

Criminal behavior gathers the criminal actions that were conducted
along the crime and resulted in the death or the injury of the victim.
The behaviors examined are: asphyxiation, strangulation, scab
wounds, burns, intoxication, gunshot and blunt object. Finally, post-criminal
behavior gathers the actions carried out by the offender after
committing the crime, they were the act of turning him/herself in to
the police or the commission, or suicide attempt.

Based on Spanish firmed sentences (from 2000 to 2010) considered
as a family homicides from Database CENDOJ (N=323), two trained
investigators in PACVHF analyzed them separately in order to collect
data about variables. A third investigator reviewed individually data
collected in order to solve discrepancies between the two first
investigators, obtaining impartial dates.

Our study is based on results obtained from the third investigator
Reviewer). The collected information was systematize in a database
and it was conducted a descriptive analysis in order to observe
percentage differences between both genders for each of the behavior
considered for the present investigation.

Furthermore, it was conducted a one-way analysis of variance
(ANOVA) in order to examine if any of the actions were associated with any
of the sexes.

Results

The main aim of the present investigation was to examine the sex
differences between aggressors in partner homicides. Three hundred
and twenty-three cases of partner homicides composed the final
sample. In 61.3% of the cases, the aggressor was a male (n=198) and in
the 38.7% of the cases the offender was a female (n=125).

Table 1 shows that four of the behaviors examined are associated
with one of the genders: instrumentality, strangulation, previous break-
ups and previous conflicts. Results reveal that instrumental behaviors
are associated with females. Considering all the behaviors examined in
the group of crime perpetration, Table 1 shows that scab wounds and
blunt objects are the most prevalent ones in both sexes.

Nonetheless, none of them is associated with a particular gender. In
fact, only one behavior of this category is associated with one of the
sexes, that is, strangulation is associated with female offenders.
Regarding pre-criminal behaviors, two out of the three behaviors are
associated with males, they are, previous break-ups and previous
conflicts. On the contrary, none of the post-criminal behaviors are
associated with any gender (Table 1).
Citation: Soria MA, Pajón L, Company A, López M, Lebrón M (2016) Expressive Partner Homicides in Spain: Differences according to Agressors

Discussion

The results of the present investigation confirm the hypothesis of the study by showing that instrumental violence is associated with female aggressors. This result is in accordance with previous studies examining expressive and instrumental violence that also concluded that whereas expressive behavior is more observed in male instrumental violence is frequently observed in female strangulation. It must be noticed that strangulation do not only refer to manual strangulation but also to the strangulation carried out with the help of an object such as a rope or a hammer for example.

The hypothesis that pre-criminal behaviors would be associated with males is also verified. Previous studies have observed that partner homicides commonly occur in contexts of interpersonal conflicts (i.e., arguments, threats, maltreatment). Both previous conflicts and previous break-ups are generally present in gender violence in the Spanish context [7,11,15,18,25,35-39,41,42], what could explain why the present investigation has found an association between males and these two variables. Interestingly, contrary to previous research, it has not been found an association with previous violence. A possible explanation could be the fact that the number of violent reports is reduced because women are afraid of doing this and suffer reprisal from her partner. It doesn’t mean a lack of previous violence, but we could not prove it.

Finally, the last hypothesis related to post criminal behavior wouldn’t be associated with any sex. In other researches about intimate partner homicide, results show an association between expressive violence and post-criminal behaviors related to offender’s regret, especially in women offenders. But we could not prove it in Spanish intimate partner homicides.

Limitation and Future Directions

The present investigation has some methodological limitations that must be considered when analyzing the results. First, the data was obtained from firm sentence that, although being a reliable source of information, they fail, in many cases, to provide all the relevant information to fulfill the "Protocolo de Análisis del Crimen Violento en Homicidios Familiares" (PACVH). Second, the quantitative nature of the study enables to control variables and study them independently, nonetheless, it does not allow to study other variables that, although previous research suggests, expressive aggression is the most basic form of aggression in both sexes [15,18,25,37,39-41]. In addition, when expressive violence is showed in a criminal behavior as homicide, the unplanned situation and impulsivity make the offender committed the crime with something around him, as a knife or a blunt object as a lamp or a hammer for example.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis and One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). *p<0.05

Table 1: Descriptive analysis and One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). *p<0.05

| Variable                  | Males (%) | Females (%) | Chi-value (sig.) |
|---------------------------|-----------|-------------|------------------|
| Type of violence          | 10.32 (0.006)* |
| Expressive violence       | 142(71.7%) | 67 (53.6%)  |
| Instrumental violence     | 15 (7.6%)  | 58 (46.4%)  |
| Pre-criminal behaviors    |           |             |                  |
| Previous threats/violence | 40 (20.4%) | 33 (36.3%)  | 3.23 (0.72)      |
| Previous break-up         | 100 (56.2%) | 33 (33.6%)  | 8.78 (0.003)*    |
| Previous conflicts        | 65 (34.2%) | 25 (20%)    | 6.78 (0.009)*    |
| Criminal behavior         |           |             |                  |
| Asphyxiation              | 10 (5.1%)  | 12 (9.6%)   | 1.83 (0.18)      |
| Strangulation             | 8 (4%)     | 17 (13.8%)  | 8.51 (0.004)*    |
| Scab wounds               | 109 (55.1%) | 66 (52.8%)  | 0.08 (0.78)      |
| Burns                     | 5 (2.5%)   | 5 (4%)      | 0.17 (0.68)      |
| Intoxication              | 2 (1%)     | 3 (2.4%)    | 0.27 (0.6)       |
| Gunshot                   | 12 (6.1%)  | 6 (4.8%)    | 0.82 (0.05)      |
| Blunt Object              | 37 (18.7%) | 21 (16.8%)  | 0.79 (0.78)      |
| Post criminal behavior    |           |             |                  |
| Turn himself to the police| 42 (35.9%) | 20 (31.7%)  | 0.16 (0.69)      |
| Suicide                   | 8 (4%)     | 5 (4%)      | 0 (1.00)         |

Discussion

The results of the present investigation confirm the hypothesis of the study by showing that instrumental violence is associated with female aggressors. This result is in accordance with previous studies examining expressive and instrumental violence that also concluded that whereas expressive behavior is more observed in male offender, instrumental violence is frequently observed in female offenders. As some authors have observed, women tend to evaluate more negatively than male the possible consequences of losing control of the situations. Furthermore, women lose control and show expressive violence under situations that tend to be more stressful if compared with the situations under which men generally react in an expressive manner [13,20,29,30]. A hypothetical explanation for that could be situations when a self-defense woman forms an attack. Considering all, it makes sense that, the only behavior, of the crime perpetration group, that was associated with females was an instrumental behavior, that is, strangulation. It must be noticed that strangulation do not only refer to manual strangulation but also to the strangulation carried out with the help of an object such as a rope.

As it was hypothesized, scab wounds and blunt objects were the most common behaviors observed in both sexes, being both conducts instrumental. One possible explanation of these results is that, as previous research suggests, expressive aggression is the most basic form of aggression in both sexes [15,18,25,37,39-41]. In addition, when expressive violence is showed in a criminal behavior as homicide, the unplanned situation and impulsivity make the offender committed the crime with something around him, as a knife or a blunt object as a lamp or a hammer for example.

The hypothesis that pre-criminal behaviors would be associated with males is also verified. Previous studies have observed that partner homicides commonly occur in contexts of interpersonal conflicts (i.e., arguments, threats, maltreatment). Both previous conflicts and previous break-ups are generally present in gender violence in the Spanish context [7,11,15,18,25,35-39,41,42], what could explain why the present investigation has found an association between males and these two variables. Interestingly, contrary to previous research, it has not been found an association with previous violence. A possible explanation could be the fact that the number of violent reports is reduced because women are afraid of doing this and suffer reprisal from her partner. It doesn’t mean a lack of previous violence, but we could not prove it.

Finally, the last hypothesis related to post criminal behavior wouldn’t be associated with any sex. In other researches about intimate partner homicide, results show an association between expressive violence and post-criminal behaviors related to offender’s regret, especially in women offenders. But we could not prove it in Spanish intimate partner homicides.

Limitation and Future Directions

The present investigation has some methodological limitations that must be considered when analyzing the results. First, the data was obtained from firm sentence that, although being a reliable source of information, they fail, in many cases, to provide all the relevant information to fulfill the "Protocolo de Análisis del Crimen Violento en Homicidios Familiares" (PACVH). Second, the quantitative nature of the study enables to control variables and study them independently, nonetheless, it does not allow to study other variables that, although previous research suggests, expressive aggression is the most basic form of aggression in both sexes [15,18,25,37,39-41]. In addition, when expressive violence is showed in a criminal behavior as homicide, the unplanned situation and impulsivity make the offender committed the crime with something around him, as a knife or a blunt object as a lamp or a hammer for example.

The hypothesis that pre-criminal behaviors would be associated with males is also verified. Previous studies have observed that partner homicides commonly occur in contexts of interpersonal conflicts (i.e., arguments, threats, maltreatment). Both previous conflicts and previous break-ups are generally present in gender violence in the Spanish context [7,11,15,18,25,35-39,41,42], what could explain why the present investigation has found an association between males and these two variables. Interestingly, contrary to previous research, it has not been found an association with previous violence. A possible explanation could be the fact that the number of violent reports is reduced because women are afraid of doing this and suffer reprisal from her partner. It doesn’t mean a lack of previous violence, but we could not prove it.

Finally, the last hypothesis related to post criminal behavior wouldn’t be associated with any sex. In other researches about intimate partner homicide, results show an association between expressive violence and post-criminal behaviors related to offender’s regret, especially in women offenders. But we could not prove it in Spanish intimate partner homicides.

Acknowledgement

Research financed by University of Barcelona, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Projects (Resolution 20th December 2010).

References

1. Last SK, Fritzon K (2005) Investigating the nature of expressiveness in stranger, acquaintance and intrafamilial homicides. Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling 2: 179-193.

2. Soria MA, Rodríguez Cortés L (2007) Perfil psicológico del homicida doméstico. Congreso latinoamericano de estudiantes de psicología, Barcelona.
3. Liem M, Roberts D (2010) Intimate partner homicide by presence or absence of a self-destructive act. Homicide Studies 13: 339–354.
4. Soria MA (2014) Violencia y homicidios familiares. Barcelona: Logos Berlin.
5. Horning AM, Salfati CG, Crawford K (2010) Prior crime specialization and its relationship to homicide crime scene behavior type. Homicide Studies 14: 377–399.
6. Anderson A, Bushman BJ (2002) Human aggression. Annual Review of Psychology 53: 27–51.
7. Salfati CG, Bateman AL (2005) Serial homicide: An investigation of behavioral consistency. Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling 2: 121–144.
8. Trojan C, Krull AC (2012) Variations in wounding by relationship intimacy in homicide cases. J Interpers Violence 27: 2869-2888.
9. Weinschenker NJ, Siegel A (2002) Bimodal classification of aggression: Affective defense and predatory attack. Aggression and Violent Behavior 7: 237-250.
10. Liqun Cao, Hou C, Bu Huang (2008) Correlates of the comparison of the offender and self-reported homicide descriptions of psychopaths and non-psychopaths. Law Hum Behav 31: 91-107.
11. Salfati CG, Park J (2007) An analysis of Korean homicide crime-scene actions. J Interpers Violence 22: 1448-1470.
12. Santtila P, Laukkonen M, Zappalà A (2007) Crime behaviors and distance travelled in homicides and rapes. Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling 4: 1-15.
13. Thijssen J, De Rutter C (2011) Instrumental and expressive violence in belgian homicide perpetrators. Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling 8: 58-73.
14. Block CR, Ovcharchyn Devitt C (2001) Are there types of intimate partner homicide? In: The Diversity of Homicide. Proceeding of the 2000 Annual Meeting of the Homicide Research Working Group. En Blackman PH, Leggett VL, Jarvis JP (Eds.) Federal Bureau of Investigation Washington, DC.
15. Santtila P, Häkkänen H, Canter D, Elfgren T, Häkkänen H (2003) Classifying homicide offenders and predicting their characteristics from crime scene behavior. Scandinavian Journal of Psychology 44: 107-118.
16. Beauregard E, Rebocho MF, Rossmo DK (2010) Target selection patterns in rape. Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling 7: 137–152.
17. Clarke, Cornish (1985) Target selection patterns in rape. Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling 7: 137–152.
18. Cornell DG, Warren J, Hawk G, Stafford E, Oram G, et al. (1996) Psychopathy in instrumental and reactive violent offenders. J Consult Clin Psychol 64: 783-790.
19. Crick NR, Dodge KA (1996) Social information-processing mechanisms in reactive and proactive aggression. Child Dev 67: 993-1002.
20. Declercq E, Audenaert K (2011) Predatory violence aiming at relief in a case of mass murder: Meloy's criteria for applied forensic practice. Behav Sci Law 29: 578-591.
21. Flight JL, Forth A E (2007) Instrumentally violent youth: The role of psychopathic traits, empathy and attachment. Criminal Justice and Behavior 34: 739-751.
22. Meloy Jr (2006) Empirical basis and forensic application of affective and predatory violence. Aust N Z J Psychiatry 40: 539-547.
23. Porter S, Woodworth M (2007) ’I’m sorry I did it... but he started it’: A comparison of the official and self-reported homicide descriptions of psychopaths and non-psychopaths. Law Hum Behav 31: 91-107.
24. Poulin F, Boivin M (2000) Reactive and proactive aggression: Evidence of a two-factor model. Psychol Assess 12: 115-122.
25. Salfati CG, Canter DV (1999) Differentiating stranger murders: profiling offender characteristics from behavioral styles. Behav Sci Law 17: 391-406.
26. Glenn AL, Raine A (2009) Psychopathy and instrumental aggression: Evolutionary, neurobiological and legal perspectives. Int J Law Psychiatry 32: 253-258.
27. Vitiello B, Stoff DM (1997) Subtypes of aggression and their relevance to child psychiatry. J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry 36: 307-315.
28. Woodworth M, Porter S (2002) In cold blood: Characteristics of criminal homicides as a function of psychopathy. J Abnorm Psychol 111: 436-445.
29. Alexander F, Allen C, Brooks J, Cole C, Campbell (2004) Reason to believe: Representations of aggression as phenomenological read-out. Sex Roles 51: 647-659.
30. Rodríguez L, Soria MA (2003) Perfil psicológico del homicida doméstico. Anuario de Psicología jurídica 13: 9-26.
31. Cassell E, Bernstein DA (2007) Criminal behavior. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. Publishers.
32. Diem C, Pizarro JM (2010) Social structure and family homicides. Journal of Family Violence 25: 521-532.
33. McFarlane JM, Campbell JC, Will S, Sachs CJ, Ulrich Y et al. (1999) Stalking and intimate partner femicide. Homicide studies 3: 300-316.
34. Soria MA, García V (2011) Protocolo de Análisis del Crimen Violento en Homicidios Familiares.
35. Salfati CG, Haratsis E (2001) Greek homicide. A behavioral examination of aggression as phenomenological read-out. Sex Roles 51: 647-659.
36. Salfati CG (2000) The nature of expressiveness and instrumentality in homicide. Implications for Offender Profiling. Homicide Studies 4: 265-293.
37. Salfati CG (2003) Offender interaction with victims in homicide: A multidimensional analysis of frequencies in crime scene behaviors. Journal of Interpersonal Violence 18: 490-512.
38. Salfati CG, DuPont F (2006) Canadian homicide: An investigation of crime-scene actions. Homicide Studies 10: 118-139.
39. Salfati CG, Haratsis E (2001) Greek homicide. A behavioral examination of offender crime-scene actions. Homicide Studies: An Interdisciplinary and International Journal 5: 335-362.
40. Santtila P, Canter D, Elfgren T, Häkkänen H (2001) The structure of crime-scene actions in finnish homicides. Homicide Studies: An Interdisciplinary and International Journal 5: 363-387.
41. Trojan C, Salfati C (2011) Linking criminal history to crime scene behavior in single-victim and serial homicide: Implications for offender profiling research. Homicide Studies: An Interdisciplinary and International Journal 15: 3-31.
42. Walters GD (2007) Measuring proactive and reactive criminal thinking with the PICTS: Correlations with outcome expectancies and hostile attribution biases. J Interpers Violence 22: 371-385.