

Study over 145-year period: Murder-suicides occur at home, in close relationships

March 7 2012, By Marc Ransford

(PhysOrg.com) -- After examining murder-suicides over a 145-year period, a Ball State research team has found the majority of such acts occur in the home and the perpetrator and victim are in an intimate relationship.

An examination of 166 murder-suicides reported by The New York Times from 1858 to 2003 also found that most involve a male [perpetrator](#) using a firearm, said Kiesha Warren-Gordon, a Ball State criminal justice professor, who points out her team's study confirms analysis found in previous research.

"Murder-suicides are rare but are usually highly publicized by the media," she said. "It is not surprising that males use a gun to kill. These are fairly easy to obtain, can be used at close range and are particularly lethal. In fact, research has shown us that males use a gun to commit suicide in the majority of cases.

"In nearly every case, such acts include people who are very well known to each other. It is usually a husband or boyfriend who shoots his wife or girlfriend. This usually happens in a private residence or home, allowing for the murder-suicide to occur in relative privacy."

"Murder Followed by Suicide: A Newspaper Surveillance Study Using The [New York Times](#)" was conducted by Warren-Gordon along with criminal justice faculty Bryan Byers and Stephen Brodt. The [Journal of Forensic Sciences](#) published the report.

The study also found:

- The majority of murder-suicides occur in December (about 15 percent) followed by August (12 percent) and September (10 percent).
- More than three-fourths (almost 77 percent) of the victims are women. If there are multiple deaths, the victims are usually children.
- Firearms are used in about 78 percent of the murders and 77 percent of the suicides.
- Knives are used in about 9 percent of [murders](#) with 6 percent of perpetrators using the weapon to take their own lives.
- Only about 3 percent of murder victims succumb to poisoning, as did 3 percent of [suicides](#).
- A private residence was the location of the murder-suicide almost 80 percent of the time followed by business (about 9 percent), public place (7 percent) and woods (3 percent).

Byers said Ball State research adds to the social scientific understanding of murder-suicide by examining the reporting of such acts in a national news outlet.

He also suggests that in the future, researchers should examine the intimate relationships between murder-suicide perpetrators and victims to learn more about events that might lead up to these devastating incidents.

"We need to examine the long-standing violence patterns and warning signs," he said. "While it is impossible to predict potential outcomes, we could see markers to warn us about possible predictors of this lethal interpersonal dynamic."

Provided by Ball State University

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