

Homicides committed by women are motivated by either gain or love, study finds

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Credit: Queensland University of Technology

Most homicides committed by women are motivated by either gain or love, a new analysis of homicide motives matched with certain victim and offender characteristics has found.

QUT School of Justice sessional academic Dr. Belinda Parker analysed 149 Australian homicides, looking at the motives for each to see if there

were distinguishing patterns of objective characteristics for each motive.

"Gain is one of seven motives that characterise the solved homicides I analysed. The others were jealousy, revenge, conviction/hate, concealment, [love](#), and thrill," Dr. Parker said

"These were studied in terms of five observable conditions of a [homicide](#): the age and gender of both victims and offenders, cause of death, relationship of victims and offenders, and location.

"While it's well-known women are at risk of being killed by an intimate [male partner](#) at separation or divorce, my analysis shows that some men, too, are at risk of death at the hands of a current or former female partner in certain situations, like [financial insecurity](#) such as the drawing up of a new will.

"Homicide of a male partner is not always motivated by a history of domestic abuse, which again challenges a lot of the prior literature."

Dr. Parker said that when love was the motive, offenders were not acting for selfish reasons.

"Here I found interesting interrelated results. Victims are either very young, aged between 1 and 9, or were over 50 – most often they are the children or parents of the offender and the homicides nearly always occur at the victim's home," Dr. Parker said.

"When children were killed for love by a woman, it was committed out of either altruism – to spare the child a life that was perceived to be filled with pain – or extended suicide, when a parent intends to commit suicide and can't bear to leave her children or that they will not survive without them.

"However when victims were older the typical offender was an intimate partner who assisted them to commit suicide or killed them to prevent further perceived suffering.

"Ultimately, its hoped that these results, along with further research might help investigators to establish motive and reduce the number of persons of interest. For example, if a male victim is older than 35 and going through a divorce the motive might be gain but if a male victim is over 65 and killed in their home, it might suggest the motive was love."

Dr. Parker said further research was needed to refine this approach.

"This study is the first of its kind to test whether homicide event motives can be considered qualitatively distinct and look at them side by side to compare each motive to one another.

"Future research could benefit from incorporating more characteristics and analysis of more cases."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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