

PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF DEATHS CAUSED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Abstract: I conducted a retrospective study of the homicides recorded in the casuistry of the Forensic Department of Sibiu County, during 2004-2013. Their incidence was 2.73% (132 homicides), with a decreasing trend over the analyzed period. The analysis of the epidemiological coordinates revealed the prevalence of males (69.69%), rural origin (56.6%) and age groups between 20-59 years old. Most cases were recorded in summer and during weekends - especially on Sundays (53.78%). The most common mechanisms of injury were the use of blunt objects and stabbing. Comparative analysis of domestic homicides vs. the rest of the homicides revealed the following: a high incidence of domestic homicides (63.3% - 81 cases); less pronounced decreasing trend over the studied period; a lower prevalence of male victims (sex ratio M/F 1,37:1 vs. 19:1); a higher prevalence in rural areas (ratio R/U of 1,38:1 vs. 0,68:1); a higher frequency of the age groups 0-9 years and over 60 years among domestic homicides, and also a significant higher incidence during spring and winter (while the other types of homicides are more common in summer). Most common mechanisms of injury were also the use of blunt objects and stabbing. In terms of the victim - perpetrator relationship, most domestic homicides were carried out by a husband on his wife and by children on their parents.

INTRODUCTION

As part of forensic activities, homicide cases due to domestic violence are frequent, having a strong emotional impact on the population and multiple socio-economic and cultural implications.(1,2)

According to the new Criminal Code entered into force on February 2014, the general notion of "manslaughter" includes the facts that affect human life, as fundamental and indispensable attribute of the human being, which its very existence depends on.(3,4) Regarding domestic violence, the Criminal Code provides specific penalties and sanctions, increased by one quarter, and criminal proceedings can be instituted ex officio.

Protection of individual, particularly of life, is a constant concern, common to all legal systems of any social order, life being protected by law, both as a biological phenomenon and as a social phenomenon, as an indispensable prerequisite to the very existence of human society.(5)

The study of homicides is one of interest nationally and internationally, so by comparing the average rate of homicides per 100.0000 inhabitants for 2005-2007 with those registered during the period 2008-2010, by Eurostat - Statistical Office of the European Community, there has been noticed a lower incidence of homicides in almost all countries.(6)

In Romania, according to the data centralized by the "Mina Minovici" National Institute of Legal Medicine, in 2012 there were 489 homicide cases nationally, confirming the downward trend noticed in the last 12 years, compared to 1992.(7) Regarding homicides due to domestic violence, there was observed a downtrend but less pronounced.

Homicide cases, including those due to domestic violence benefit from forensic autopsy, attempting thereby, to elucidate all aspects regarding tanathogenesis, the mechanism of

production of traumatic injuries, type of sharp objects used and, possibly to establish some vulnerable groups and risk factors.(8,9,10)

PURPOSE

The relative increased incidence of homicides observed in Sibiu County made me investigate this phenomenon, with a view to identify the ethiopathogenic factors suitable for effective preventive measures, but especially to divide cases of homicides in the two groups (domestic homicides or other homicides).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

I performed a retrospective study, during 2004-2013, examining findings of forensic reports - autopsy, toxicology analysis registers, histopathology reports as well, forensic psychiatric evaluations of minors within the archives of Sibiu County Forensic Service and Medias Forensic Office.

Of all forensic autopsies performed during this period of time (a number of 3 604), 2 474 were represented by violent deaths, and of these, 132 cases were homicides. I analyzed the distribution of these cases based on evolutionary tendency, mesological factors, the main epidemiological coordinates regarding the victim, their mechanism of production and, the results of the toxicological analyzes. Later, I divided the total number of cases in two groups, as follows: the first group included domestic homicides, and the second group included other homicides, comparatively analyzing them, depending on the above-mentioned parameters. From the epidemiological point of view, I analyzed the distribution of cases by gender, age, and seasonality.

Regarding the mesological factors, I analyzed the distribution of cases according to social and family environment

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of victims and, especially, the doers, and education level of the perpetrators. I have also performed an analysis of the incidence of domestic violence in all homicide cases.

I followed the distribution of cases according to the toxicology results, especially the amount of alcohol, and possibly drugs. I paid special attention to the morpho-pathological analysis of death-causing injuries and to their cumulation, associated lesions, their mechanism of production and time of death reported to aggression time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Between 2004 and 2013, there were conducted a total of 3 604 autopsies within Sibiu County Forensic Service and Medias Forensic Office. The share of the total number of homicide circumstances of violent deaths production during 2004-2013 was 2 474 cases.

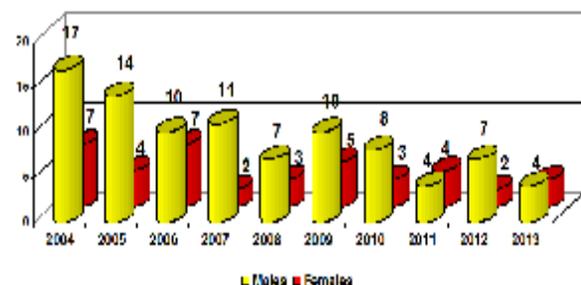
I analyzed the distribution by years of the number of homicides, noting a significant decrease of cases up to 2008, from 18.18% in 2004 to 7.57% in 2008, subsequently, an increase in 2009 to a total of 11.36%, followed by a relatively constant decrease, up to 5.30% in 2013. This figure shows a 70% decrease in the number of murders nowadays, compared with 2004 (figure no. 1).

Figure no. 1. Annual repartition of homicide cases in the period 2004-2013



Following the gender distribution of cases in the period under study, I detected a higher prevalence in males, as shown in the literature. Subsequently, I deepened this criterion, examining the incidence by gender according to each year of the study period, as shown in the figure below (figure no. 2).

Figure no. 2. Gender distribution of homicide cases in the period 2004-2013



Next, I followed the distribution of cases by victim's age, revealing a relatively high proportion of those belonging to the age groups of 50-59 years old and 20-29 years old (18.18%, respectively 15.15%). There was found a high frequency in the age range of 30-49 years old and > 70 years old.

Distribution of cases by the place where the homicide took place showed a higher proportion of homicides in rural

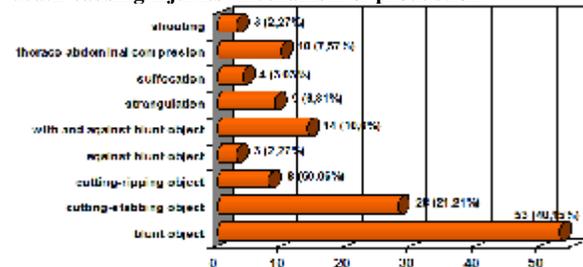
areas, by more than 12% compared to urban areas as related to the entire period under study. Analyzing the distribution by year, it was noted that in 2009 and 2010, urban areas were predominant, while in 2011, the number of homicide cases in urban areas was equal to that of rural areas.

Regarding the distribution of homicides depending on the season, there has been highlighted a maximum thereof during summertime and a minimum in winter. Analyzing the time of homicides, there has been noticed an increased incidence on week-ends, precisely on Saturdays and Sundays, in a percentage of 73.48%, and of these, approximately two thirds took place on Sundays. Of the 35 (26.51%) of homicides that occurred during Monday-Friday, 16, i.e. about 45 %, occurred on a Wednesday.

Another investigated parameter was the toxicological analysis, based on which it was found out that in approximately 44.7% of cases, the victim was drunk; most commonly there were registered blood alcohol values between 1 and 2 ‰ (48% of cases).

Analyzing the mechanism of production of the death-causing injuries, during 2004-2013, it was noticed that most commonly, these were produced by striking with a blunt object (40.15%); other relatively common mechanisms were hitting with a cutting-stabbing object, respectively hitting with and against blunt objects.

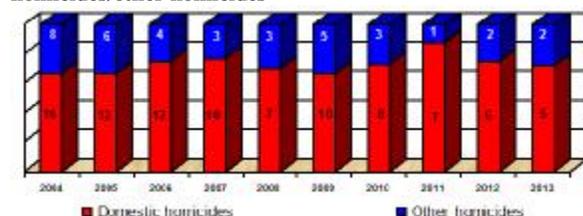
Figure no. 3. Distribution of homicide cases according to the death-causing injuries' mechanism of production



The primary objective of this study is dividing the number of homicides in two batches. The criterion for inclusion in the first group is the existence of the degree of relationship between the victim and the criminal, and the other batch included all homicides that do not fit this criterion. Of the 132 cases of murders that took place in Sibiu County, in the period 2004-2013, two do not fit into any of the two groups, since it was about "unknown author", so reporting will be done for 130 cases. There was highlighted a net prevalence of domestic homicides of 63.3% of cases, compared with 37.7% of other homicides.

Regarding the evolutionary trend of domestic homicides / other homicides, there has also been observed a downward trend in cases of domestic homicides, but with an increase in their weight - from 2/1 in 2004 to a maximum of 7/1 in 2011.

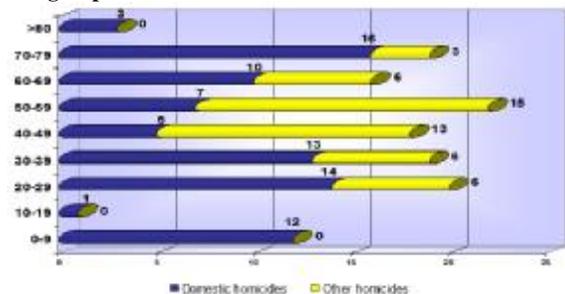
Figure no. 4. Annual distribution of domestic homicides/other homicides



Regarding the comparative distribution of bathes per gender, we revealed that 95% of female victims fit the category of domestic homicides, while for males, this ratio is only of 47.7%. Thus, the ratio of domestic homicides / other homicides for females is of 19: 1 and for males is of 0.91: 1.

Next, I divided the two groups according to age, finding an increased share of domestic homicides in the age groups of 20-39 and over 60 years old, while the other homicides had a greater weight in the age group of 40-59 years old.

Figure no. 5. Distribution of cases according to age in the two groups

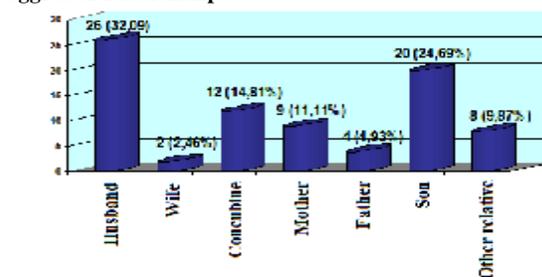


Regarding the area of origin, there was noticed a higher share of domestic homicides in rural areas - 61.72%. In urban areas, as well, there was highlighted a higher share of domestic homicides, but only in a percentage of 53.44%.

Domestic homicides were more common in winter and spring - 20.76%, respectively 19.23% of total homicides (winter - 82% of domestic homicides). There has also been an increased incidence of domestic homicides on Saturdays and Sundays (85.2%) and, of 69 domestic homicides produced on weekends, 54 (78.3%) took place on Sundays.

Analyzing the degree of relationship between the victim and the perpetrator of domestic homicides, in most of the case, the perpetrator was the husband (32.09%), increased incidence, the son (24.69%), and the concubine (14.81%) (figure no. 6).

Figure no. 6. Cases distribution according to victim-aggressor relationship



As regards, victim's blood alcohol value, in domestic homicides, there was detected increased weight of alcohol of 0 grams per thousand (50.31%), while in other homicides, alcohol values greater than 0 (75.51%), especially between 1.01 to 3 grams permille (forensic drunkenness).

The distribution of the two groups depending on the mechanism of production of death-generating lesions showed for domestic homicides that the most frequent mechanism was hitting with a blunt object (42%); a significant weight was registered for hitting with a cutting-stabbing object, as well. The relation between domestic homicides / other homicides in the situation of hitting with a blunt object was of 2: 1, respectively 3.6:1 for hitting with a cutting-stabbing object.

CONCLUSIONS

The relatively high incidence of homicides within the casuistry of Sibiu County Forensic Service, during 2004-2013 (5.33% of all violent deaths), registers, however, a net downward trend. Overall, I found: net prevalence of males; higher incidence of homicides in rural areas; predominance of the age groups of 50-59 and 20-29 years old; increased frequency in the hot season (31%) and on weekends (three quarters of murders); in about 45% of cases, the victim was under the influence of alcohol with a prevalence of blood alcohol content between 1.01-2 grams per thousand; hitting with a blunt object was the most common mechanism of production of death-generating injuries, followed by hitting with a cutting-stabbing object. Regarding the comparative analysis of the two groups, there has been shown an important share, of about two thirds (63.3%) of domestic homicides, as well as the same downward trend of domestic homicides, but with an increase in their share (up to 7/1 in 2011).

We highlighted the following significant differences between groups: 95% of female victims were involved in domestic hetero-aggression with fatal outcomes (domestic homicides / other homicides: in ♀ = 19: 1, in ♂ = 0.91: 1); increased share of domestic homicides in the age groups of 20-39 years old and over 60 years old, other homicides - 40-59 years old; higher share of domestic homicides in rural areas - 61.72% (domestic homicides / other homicides = 2.3:1); domestic homicides - more common in winter, other homicides - during summer, on Saturdays-Sundays - 85% versus 53%; domestic homicides - most often hitting with a hard object (42%), domestic homicides / other homicides = 2:1; 75% of other homicides - due to alcohol consumption; compared to domestic homicides - 27% (frequently, blood alcohol content between 1.01 to 3 grams permille-forensic drunkenness). Regarding domestic assaults, we analysed the victim-aggressor relationship, noticing a maximum incidence of aggressor being the husband (one third of cases), followed by the son as being the aggressor (one third of cases), and the concubine.

Knowing these statistical differences between the two groups constitutes a starting point for targeted preventive measures, with the purpose of reducing hetero-aggression with fatal outcomes in domestic / household environments.

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