



## Short report

## Homicide–suicide in Brescia County (Northern Italy): A retrospective study from 1987 to 2012



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## ABSTRACT

From January 1987 to December 2012, 19 homicide–suicide events were registered at the Brescia Institute of Forensic Medicine (Northern Italy), leading to 39 deaths (20 homicide victims and 19 suicide victims). The homicide victims were females in the total of the cases (100%), while perpetrators were exclusively males (100%). Only one event involved foreigners as both victim and perpetrator, all the other cases regarded Italian people. The average age was 37.3 years for the homicide victims and 41.57 years for the offenders. Perpetrators usually used a firearm both for murder (65%) and suicide (84%). In 66% of the cases the homicide–suicide events occurred at home; homicide victims were strictly bound to their perpetrators (husband, boyfriend or ex boyfriend, father) in all the events.

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## 1. Introduction

Homicide–suicide is a particular kind of killing in which the perpetrator commits suicide after killing his victim(s). It is known by a variety of names, including murder–suicide and dyadic death. In Italy, from 2000 to 2008, 340 homicide–suicide events (with a total of 1000 victims) were registered.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this study was to describe and characterize all the homicide–suicide events reported at the Institute of Forensic Medicine in the County of Brescia between 1987 and 2012, covering a 26-year period. Brescia County is located in the Lombardy region (Northern Italy), with an area of 4784 square kilometers. It's one of the most relevant industrialized Italian site, with important cultural and economic exchanges and an high immigration rate. Its population has constantly grown in the last decades, reaching about 1,250,000 inhabitants in the last census (2011), with a life expectancy of 79.5 years for men and 84.7 years for women.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Materials and method

All the homicide–suicide information came from the post-mortem investigations conducted by the Brescia Institute of Forensic Medicine from January 1987 to December 2012. Over this period, the Institute registered 240 homicide victims and 709 suicides: 20 homicides ended with perpetrator's suicide (19 events).

The data analyzed for each case included: (1) year, month and day of the event; (2) information about perpetrators' and victims' characteristics (sex, age, nationality); (3) relationship between offender and his victim(s); (4) injurious means; (5) place of the crime; (6) toxicological exam outcomes (whenever mandated by the Law).

## 3. Results

During the 26-year period (1987–2012), a total of 19 homicide–suicide events were registered in Brescia County, involving 39 persons: 20 homicide victims and 19 suicide victims. Only in one case the perpetrator committed a double homicide. The average of the events was 0.73 per year, with a slight prevalence in September (21%) and on Monday (26.3%). About one fifth of the cases occurred in 2001 (5 homicide and 4 suicide victims) (Fig. 1). Perpetrators committed suicide just after the homicide in all the events except one, in which suicide occurred the day after the homicide.

## 3.1. Perpetrators and victims

All the 20 homicide victims were females while the 19 perpetrators were exclusively males. Considering that all the victims were females, this phenomenon seems to belong to “femicide” (i.e. female killing) tragedy.

The mean age of the homicide victims was 37 years; most of them (6 woman, 30%) had an age between 21 and 30 years (Fig. 2; Table 5). Only one child was involved: a 3-years baby killed by his

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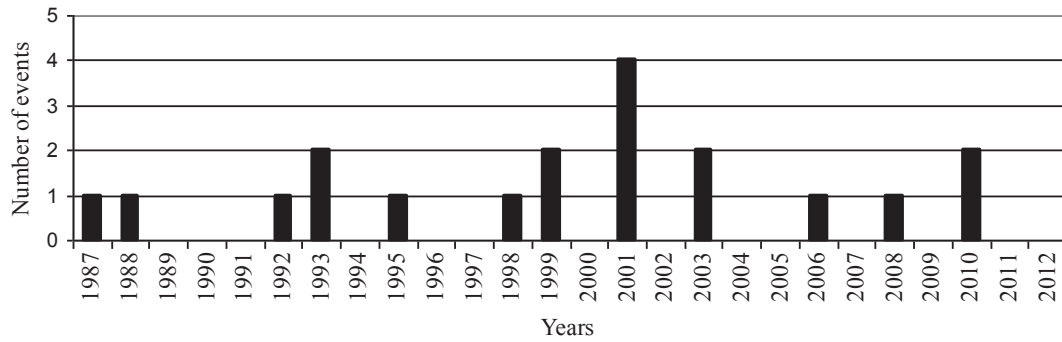


Fig. 1. Temporal distribution.

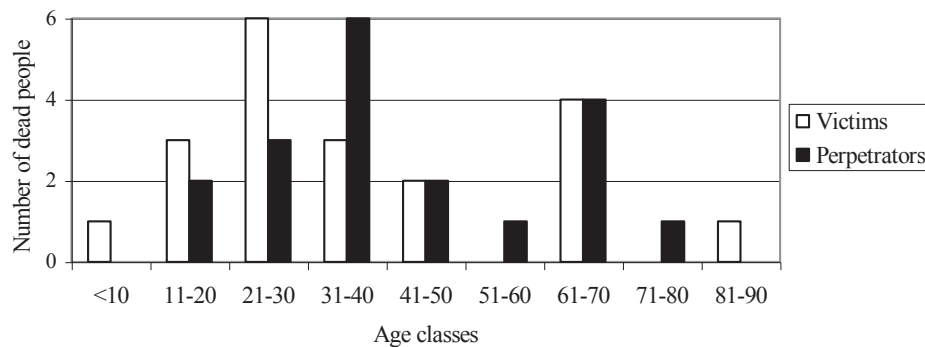


Fig. 2. Age distribution for perpetrators and victims.

**Table 1**  
Perpetrators' and victims' job.

| Job               | Perpetrators | Victims | Total |
|-------------------|--------------|---------|-------|
| Factory worker    | 1            | 3       | 4     |
| Retired:          | 5            | 5       | 10    |
| Unknown           | 2            | 5       | 7     |
| Ex-bricklayer     | 1            |         | 1     |
| Ex-factory worker | 1            |         | 1     |
| Ex-storekeeper    | 1            |         | 1     |
| Security guard    | 1            |         | 1     |
| Employed          | 1            | 1       | 2     |
| Nurse             |              | 2       | 2     |
| Bricklayer        | 2            |         | 2     |
| Shop assistant    |              | 1       | 1     |
| Driver            | 1            |         | 1     |
| Hairdresser       | 1            | 1       | 2     |
| Waiter            | 1            |         | 1     |
| Student           |              | 1       | 1     |
| Body-repairer     | 1            |         | 1     |
| Unknown           | 5            | 6       | 11    |
| Total             | 19           | 20      | 39    |

father. The murderers' age varied between 19 and 80 years (mean 42 years); the youngest was a 19-years old boy who killed his girlfriend while the oldest an 80-years old man who killed his wife. In 14 cases (70%) the homicide victims were younger than their murderers (mean 10 years), in 4 cases (20%) older (mean 5 years), while in 2 cases (10%) victims and murderers were old in the same way. Homicide victims and perpetrators were Italian in all but one event where the victim was a Romanian woman killed by a man of the same nationality. At the time of the event, most of the homicide victims and perpetrators were workers in activity, mostly unskilled manual workers; a quarter of victims were retired persons (Table 1). No information was available regarding perpetrator's mental illness, except for one case, suffering from depression.

### 3.2. Perpetrator–victim relationship

All the victims were related to their perpetrators by an intimate binding (Fig. 3; Table 5): wife (9 cases, 45%), ex-girlfriend (4 cases, 20%), girlfriend (3 cases, 15%), daughter (2 cases, 10%) and lovers (2

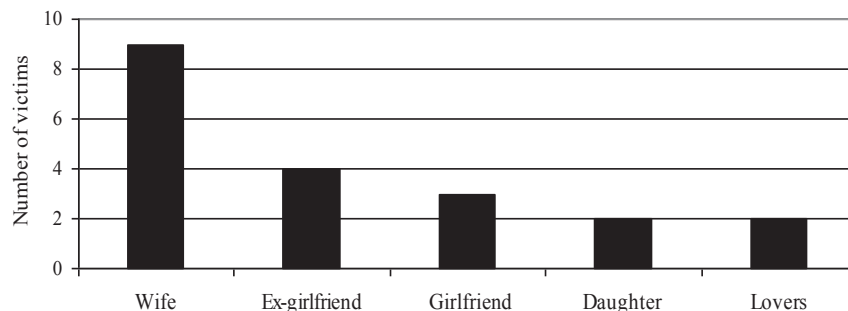


Fig. 3. Relationship in homicide–suicide events (homicide victims).

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