Fatal Family Violence Across the Life Course

Sonia Salari, PhD Associate Professor
Department Family and Consumer Studies
University of Utah, Salt Lake City UT 84112
Twitter: @SoniaFVALCbook
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Ecological Iceberg of Family Violence

Unmeasured represents unreported, private, isolated, secretive ... important component --> study homicide for measurability
(Salari 2011; 2015)
Homicides

► Measurable- FBI Police reports Supplemental Homicide Reports (SHR)

► Most are one-on-one events (9/11 not included)

► Majority of offenders are known, relationship between offender and victim usually known

► Allen, Salari & Burkner (under review)

FBI SHR 1980-2013 homicides by sex & age
Patterns of homicide by sex and age

- Infants most often killed by family members—
  - Neonates by mother
  - Young children by father, stepfather or mother boyfriend
- Infants cannot flee, post partum, child abuse
- Methods least severe of murder victims
- Children 5-12 least likely murdered
- Age 12+ children begin to kill each other

Adult homicide

- Men most likely murdered, by other men...
  - Mostly young male victims and offenders--acquaintances or stranger relationship
  - Old men killed by young men
- 3% of murdered men are killed by current or former intimate partner

- Women almost never kill other women
- Women most often murdered by men
- 39% of women victims killed by current or former intimate partner
Later life one-on-one homicides-(red = 60+)

Top relationship status of murdered in later life = wife

Later Life Femicide - women killed by loved ones in later life

The homicide may be preceded by a suicide by offender

The future... a perfect storm....

- Baby boom cohort always more suicidal (17.9 per 100,000)
- Old (white) men are the most suicidal (29 per 100,000)
- Health care crisis -lack of mental health parity
- Firearms availability in the US 88.8 firearms per 100 people (highest in the world) (WHO 2013)
  US has the highest population adjusted murder & suicide rates
What is the role of firearms? Purchase vs. Possession

- 31,000 firearm deaths per year (11,000 homicides, 20,000 suicides)
- 20x more US firearm homicides than any developed nation
  - 2009 Japan vs. US
- Gun lobby controls politics and will not disclose possession, hardly enforcing purchase
- 40% of gun purchases totally unregulated (gun shows - private sales)
- 7 million Federal crimes are not updated in FBI Datasets (background chks)

- My recommendation: later life is a possession issue

**voluntary buyback**

20 year ban on firearms research
Special interests influence political system
Overturn Citizen’s United SCOTUS decision

Now seeing potential link between DV/family annihilation and other mass shootings
Intimate Partner Homicide Suicide (IPHS) and Familicide (Family Annihilators)

Photo: Familicide Muncie Indiana, Indianapolis Star January 5, 1923, Page 11.

No justice—perpetrator controlled
Undercounted—no HS link in data
Femicide—majority of victims female
Heavy community impact and trauma
Ageism appears in reporting

Salari –Sillito

IPHS News Surveillance Study

Content analysis of news articles, TV transcripts, obituaries, police reports of cases 1999-2005
--homicide-suicide events among intimate partners
--Within group analysis
--qualitative examination of commentary, reporting

Newslink.org 1,193 major news sources
U.S. newspapers & TV News stations

Key word search –homicide-suicide, murder-suicide, murder attempted suicide, attempted murder suicide, suicide pact, etc.
3 age groups measured by age of oldest member—All U.S. States represented

18-44 (N=329)—803 deaths, (20 survived)—C.L. Sillito

45-59 (N=177)—386 deaths, (9 survived, 41 secondary)

60+ (N=225)—444 deaths, (22 survived, 16 secondary)

731 events—1633 human deaths total

Firearms deaths are the majority for all ages

Young 89% Middle aged 91% Elder 87%

Victims IPHS Femicide

➤ Women are the primary victims of IPHS

➤ Male offenders / Female victims
  ➤ Young adults 99.7%
  ➤ Middle aged 92% male
  ➤ Elder adults 97% male

➤ Women are unwilling participants in IPHS
➤ End of life decision making
➤ Not viewed as autonomous
➤ Domestic violence 100%
➤ Fight or flight—potentially unaware
Family Annihilation

- Mapleton UT, Sandy UT
- Firearms make this more possible
- Sillito & Salari, 2011 examined child outcomes of IPHS n=441

Offenders - We identified 2 distinct primary intentions:

**Suicide:**
- Sad/ depressed/ suicidal
- Financial troubles, gambling
- Turmoil or confusion
- Tired, worn out
- Suicide note about self
- Killed others in sleep
- Very quiet or nice guy
- Neighbors had positive things to say about perpetrator

**Homicide:**
- DV history, threats, IT
- Protective order
- Other crimes against V
- Kidnapped V
- Stalked V
- Multiple or severe wounds
- Killed new love interest or family of V
- Suicide to avoid punishment

Salari & Sillito 2006; 2016
INTIMATE TERRORISTS—homicidal intentions, purposeful isolation, campaign of fear, power and control tactics, stalking, terrorism, previous DV, threats (Johnson, 2008)

CASE STUDY

IT Perpetrator (65), victim (54) They dated for about a year, she ended the relationship. He learned of her new boyfriend and came to her workplace. He shot her in the back and again in the face, killing her. Co-workers were terrified and endangered.

Her daughter “[Perpetrator] was obsessed with her. He would not leave her alone.”
IPHS Primarily homicidal vs. primarily suicidal perpetrator by age category; young, middle aged and elder adult.


Elder cases often attributed to “mercy killing”

Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

Defn of “mercy killing”

--Act to bring about immediate death, allegedly in painless way based on the clear indication that the dying person wished to die because of a terminal or hopeless condition

--Investigators are warned not to count MS cases “without evidence of consent of party”

This study suggests vast majority don’t fit definition
Disability Rights: Victim not a willing participant

This case: Victim fought back (she was ill)
--He survived his attempted suicide

Another over emphasized event

Elder Suicide Pacts—actually extremely rare
(only 6% of known motive cases)
--mutual decision, may be male initiation (control?)
--9 “suicide pacts,” 6 had joint suicide notes

EX: --couple tied together

--Hotel--$200 tip to maids

--GA surviving perp claimed wife terminal & suicide pact,
autopsy--victim had no illness

Middle aged
—2 suicide pacts (1%)
Cyber stalking murder suicide

Homicide is never romantic

- IPHS is often “romanticized” in later life
- IPHS is always domestic violence
Tone of commentary only reported in elderly IPHS cases:

Media Article Titles: Couple died 'very much in love'

“Couple inseparable in life and death”

Neighbor

“It seemed like the rational thing to do”

“He figured it was the best way out for both of them”

“He might have killed her out of mercy. I don’t think he did it out of cruelty. He did it out of kindness”

Police

“He killed the love of his life”

“Deaths do not appear to be domestic violence. A scenario of poor health” (wife beat to death w/ hatchet)

“No sign of foul play”

Clues from survivors…

St. George Utah—male perpetrator(72) female victim (71)

Both survived

Bloodied Wife ran to gas station with zip tie around neck

--cried in terror that husband tried to kill her

--He held her against her will for 8 hours

--Trapped her inside with carbon monoxide

--she escaped, he was found with zip tie on neck

Q: If they had died…

would it have been reported as a love story?

would it have been blamed on their health?

we must recognize domestic violence in murder suicide
Media Exposure

I encourage news outlets not to romanticize later life IPHS

Appropriate: Washington Post

Murder-suicide disturbing trend among the elderly


Chester & Mildred married 60 years Wilkes Barre PA
He removed her from nursing home and shot her in parking lot—killed self.
Nursing home staff and residents were traumatized.

I was interviewed by a reporter at The Times Leader
“Researchers who have studied murder suicide among the elderly say they are troubled by society’s tendency to view such deaths as mercy killings. “One of the concerns is you don’t want to make it sound like it’s a viable thing to do,” said Sonia Salari, a professor in the Department of Family and Consumer Studies at the University of Utah. “If we romanticize it, it makes it sound like it is OK.”

“Statistics regarding the number of elderly murder-suicides committed each year are difficult to come by, as no agency specifically tracks that category of deaths, Salari said.” “In a 2005 study, Salari analyzed 225 intimate partner murder-suicides involving couples where either the victim or perpetrator was at least age 60. She gathered the data from news reports, police reports and obituaries published from 1999 to 2005. The research showed that in 55% of cases, health issues involving either victim or perpetrator—were cited as a contributing factor. Approximately 7.5 percent of the victims had some sort of dementia.

Compassion or murder?
Salari said that, while she sympathizes with survivors who view the deaths as an act of compassion, society cannot lose sight of the fact that a person’s life was taken without consent. “Some people don’t consider it domestic violence, but we need to see it that way,” she said. “You have two deaths...Most of the time the victim is not in on the plan.”

Q: Guesses about the title of the article?
“The love that led a couple to stand in front of a train”
--follow up article I advised --don’t romanticize or infantilize
The Washington Post
“New York couple dies in freight train suicide”
--Huffington Post
“Husband Forces Ailing Wife In Front Of Train In Alleged Murder-Suicide”
UPDATE:
“NYS Troopers ruled couple’s death by train a murder-suicide”

ONEIDA, N.Y. -- State police have ruled Earl and Mary Myatt’s death by train in Verona Sunday a murder-suicide. Trooper Jack Keller said Mary Myatt was not a “willing participant” in her death. Police came to that conclusion after reviewing two accounts of what happened, along with information about Mary Myatt’s mental condition. Keller said investigators spoke with the conductor, who saw the couple on the tracks before the train hit them. They also looked at a video, owned by the train company, that shows Earl Myatt taking Mary Myatt to the tracks. That, combined with information about Mary Myatt’s mental ability, which was that of a child, helped police reach that conclusion, Keller said. Mary Myatt suffered a brain aneurysm in January and had multiple surgeries on her skull. Earl Myatt picked up his wife from the Oneida Healthcare Extended Care Facility for her regular visit with her grandchildren...

Q: Why are these Stereotypes Dangerous?

Romanticized IPHS could encourage those on the brink to imitate—contagion
Prevention: Lethality Assessment Modification

- Has violence increased in frequency? Severity?
- Is abuser violently and consistently jealous?
- Are children being abused?
- Does this person control your activities?
- Have they assaulted others?
- Are they cruel to animals and pets?
- Have you been physically abused during pregnancy?
- Does the person care about personal image?
- Any mental health issues?
- Do you have mental health issues?
- Does person abuser drugs and alcohol?
- Do you use drugs and alcohol?
- Were you raised in abusive home?
- Was other raised in an abusive home?
- Have you separated before?
- Has person forced sexual activity?
- Has other threatened to kill/harm you, your children or selves?
- History of stalking?
- Dropped out of DV treatment program?
- Does person have a physical or medical condition?
- Was person drinking?
- Has person lost job?
- Are you currently separated?
- Is person under stress?
- Does person have extended family issues?
- Have you been abused by this person before? Another person?

Tends to be focused on homicidal intent, intimate terrorist perps

Must modify for IPHS mid and later life—focus on suicide risk

List available Salari (2007)

Knowledge, Prevention and Policy

- Know distinctions of young, mid/later life abuse
- Media reporting matters!
  - Romanticized IPHS —contagion
- Recognize suicidality as a risk
  - Suicidality of the baby boomers
  - Enmeshment—perp lack of recognition of victim autonomy
- Modify assessments and services, shelters
- Policy Violence Against Women Act VAWA & Elder Justice Act
  - Gun safety reform