

Female victims and offenders in South African parricides, 1990-2019

Melanie Moen^{a,b,*} and Phillip Shon^b

^aUniversity of Pretoria, Faculty of Education, Pretoria, South Africa;

^bUniversity of Ontario Institute of Technology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Oshawa, Canada

*Correspondence to: Melanie Moen. Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Cnr of George torrar and Leyds Streets, Groenkloof, Pretoria 0028 South Africa.

Email: melanie.moen@up.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Women have been primarily discussed as victims and offenders in intimate partner homicides and offenders in infanticides. In the parricide literature, women have been depicted as overly domineering and controlling figures who keep a tight leash on their offspring. Female parricide offenders have been explained as a reaction to prolonged abuse. Most of the parricide literature, however, has examined female offenders and victims in Western contexts. This study examines the unique characteristics of women victims and women offenders in South African parricides. One unique finding from our study indicates that contract killings of parents in murder-for-hire plots involve sociological processes.

Key Words: Parricide; Female Offender Parricide; Female Parricide Victims; South Africa Homicide; Contract murder; Family murder.

Introduction

Parricide is defined as the killing of a near blood relative under South African law (Bell, Milne, Cooper, & Burne, 1951). This expansive definition of parricide contrasts from the restrictive definition of parricide which includes only fathers, mothers, stepfathers, and stepmothers (Heide, 2013). This study uses the term ‘parricide’ to refer to the killing of mothers, fathers, stepparents, or superordinate elders such as uncles, aunts, grandparents, and in-laws by subordinate family members such as children, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, and sons/daughters-in-law. Despite the numerous family members who are included in the definition of parricide under South African law, there are good reasons to focus on women who kill and are killed in parricide incidents.

Previous literature has shown that women are more likely to use accomplices in homicides and parricides (Heide, Roe-Sepowitz, Solomon, & Chan, 2012). This offense characteristic is especially true for teenage female offenders who may lack the strength and sophistication to carry out a killing on their own (Heide, 2013, 2014; Sellers & Heide, 2012). Consequently, they may seek the assistance of a friend or a professional killer to carry out their plans. Although the literature has noted the occurrence of such transactional relationships that exist in the contract killings of parents (Shon, 2009, 2016), it remains unknown how such processes might be socially organized.

Women who have been killed in parricide incidents have been limited to biological mothers and stepmothers (Heide, 2014). However, this victim-offender relationship exists primarily in nuclear households. In multigenerational households, there may be additional

victims who may appear as victims. For instance, female relatives may be at risk of being killed when domestic conflicts erupt as they perform the household tasks; moreover, as primary caretakers of children who have been orphaned due to the AIDS epidemic or whose parents have moved to the city in search of work (Njue, Rombo, Smart, Lutomia, & Mbirianjau, 2014; Nkosi & Daniels, 2014), women in South Africa face multiple risk factors for ascending forms of violence. Black women in African countries in particular face accusations of witchcraft, which escalates their risk of being targeted for matricides (Adinkrah, 2018).

The presence of women in the household, as elderly caregivers and superordinate elders, and as young daughters whose parents are absent from the household, facilitates potential victimization in additional ways. Grandmothers and aunts who socialize the children and delineate the parameters of appropriate behavior (Scruggs, 2004) may do so using inconsistent disciplinary practices that erode parental attachment (Moen, 2017). In their attempts to impose discipline and adult supervision female elders face the risk of child-to-parent violence as they delineate boundaries and prohibit autonomy in adolescents (Holt, 2013; Mberengwa, Maundeni, & More, 2014).

Moreover, girls who grow up in multigenerational households are exposed to potential sexual violence from their agnatic kin as well as strangers who are present in the household (Fourie, 2004). There are two factors that increase the risk of girls' sexual violence in South Africa. The HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa had fostered the belief that having sex with a virgin will lead to a cure (Fourie, 2004). This (false) cultural belief has led to the sexual abuse of young girls (Nkosi & Daniels, 2014). Multigenerational households are also dependent on a single wage earner, often a pensioner; one informal way that households have supplemented this meager income is by taking in male boarders. Prior research has also shown that familial and extrafamilial sexual predators are motivated by opportunity and availability rather than psychopathology (Blanchard et al., 2006). Young girls in South African households may be exposed to abuse in its myriad forms as noted in previous parricide literature (Heide, 1994). It behooves us to examine if this is applicable to a South African context. This paper examines the female victim and female offender characteristics of parricides in South Africa.

Review of the Literature

As victims and offenders in homicide incidents across the past and present, women have been circumscribed by their role in families (Callahan, 2013; Tragardh, Nilsson, Granath, & Sturup, 2016). In the historical and contemporary homicide literature, women have appeared as victims of and offenders in intimate partner homicides (Kethineni, 2001; Pleck, 1992). The literature has shown that the likelihood of becoming a victim of intimate partner homicide for women is asymmetrically distributed: they are likely to die at the hands of their male partners in 2/3 to 3/4 of intimate partner homicides (Gauthier & Bankston, 1997). In the remaining quarter and third of incidents, women are likely to be offenders.

Prior works have shown that women who kill their husbands and boyfriends do so in contexts that are different from male killings. Whereas men kill their intimate partners as extension of their prior violence, as a form of patriarchal communication that reiterates women's subordinate status (Haag, 1992; Elisha, Idisis, Timor & Addad, 2010), women do so for defensive reasons, killing to protect themselves and their children from on-going and imminent assaults (Belknap, Larson, Abrams, Garcia & Block, 2012; Browne, 1987). The decline in intimate partner homicides in North America has been attributed to the changes in gender roles

as well as the shifts in attitudes toward spousal assaults and the criminal justice response to them (Dawson, Pottie, & Balde, 2009; Dugan, Nagin, & Rosenfeld, 1999). Although some works note parallels in the motivations of women who kill their male partners to the men who kill, that is for sexual propriety reasons (Kruttschnitt & Carbone-Lopez, 2006), there is consensus that women bear the brunt of violence from their male intimate partners (Swatt & He, 2006).

Women have been portrayed as the principal offenders in infanticides (Caron, 2010; Muftic & Maumann, 2012). Although men instigate the commission of infanticides through sexual abuse of young women in subordinate positions, which leads to unwanted pregnancies that the women must then resolve through infanticides, women have suffered the legal consequences throughout the past and present (Farrell, 2012). Young, poor women who lack the resources to rear their offspring have killed their infants as a survival strategy (Oberman, 2002). That infanticides are committed by young, single women even in contemporary periods iterates the logic of evolutionary psychological thinking on violence toward infants (Friedman, Cavney, & Resnick, 2012). While much is known about women as victims and offenders in intimate partner homicides and infanticides, other categories of murder that involve women as victims and offenders have been omitted from the parricide literature.

For example, women are the main targets of ascending forms of violence from their sons in child-to-parent violence (Ibabe & Jaureguizar, 2010; Routt & Anderson, 2011). Studies from the UK suggest that there is a gross disproportionality in the victims who are targeted by their children for verbal, emotional, and physical violence: mothers are nine times more likely than fathers to be physically assaulted (Holt, 2013). In ascending forms of violence against mothers that turn fatal, mothers are almost equally likely to be killed by their sons and daughters in matricide incidents (Holt, 2017). This equal likelihood of victimization in parricide incidents suggests that there may be unique circumstances that shape violence against women, mothers in particular, that merit analytical attention.

Mothers who are victims of matricides have been explained in two ways. First, they have been described in the clinical literature as domineering and controlling figures who keep a tight emotional reign on their offspring, adult men killing their mothers as a form of severance of the maternal bond (Schug, 2011). Second, they have been conceptualized as domestic partners in the household who are killed in ways that mirror the offense characteristics of intimate partner killings, killed during the course of domestic arguments and fights that turn fatal (Shon, 2009, 2018). It remains unknown how the women who are killed in parricide incidents in South Africa might be similar to and different from the ones described in the parricide literature.

Finally, parricide is already an atypical form of homicide. Daughters who kill their parents represent one of the rarest class of offenders in the homicide literature. The handful of works that exist on female parricide offenders suggest that abuse—sexual, physical, and emotional—configures in significant ways as risk factors in parricide incidents (Shon & Targonski, 2003; Shon & Williams, 2013). It remains unknown if such patterns of abuse that previous scholars in North America and Europe have noted are applicable in a South African context.

South Africa: The Research Setting

South Africa's population is estimated at 58.78 million people. The population is ethnically and linguistically diverse. The major ethnic groups are Black Africans (80.7 %),

Coloureds¹ (8.8%), Indian/Asians (2.6%) and Whites (7.9%). Gauteng, followed by KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape are the most populace provinces. A third of the population is under the age of 15, whilst 8% of the population is aged 60 and over (Statistics South Africa, 2017). High unemployment and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS have created a larger than normal dependent population. The average life expectancy of males is estimated at 62.7 years and 65.6 years for females. South Africa's population is predominantly urban with 66.9% of the population living in urban areas (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). The overall literacy rate of adults is estimated at 95% (Statista, 2019). About 20% of the country's workforce is employed in the financial sector, and 18% in government followed by trade (15%). South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated at \$348.3 billion in 2017 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). Almost 20% of South African households have inadequate access to food and 49.2% of the adult population live below the upper-bound poverty line (Statistics South Africa, 2019). A third of the population lives on social grants, of which 11 million are younger than 18 (Rossouw, 2017). South Africa has the highest rate of inequality in the world, driven almost exclusively along racial lines. Countrywide, more than 45% of Black Africans are unemployed compared with only 5% of Whites (Mngxitama, 2015 in Breetske, 2018).

South Africa has strict policies pertaining to firearms. According to the Firearms Control Act of 2000, no person may possess a firearm unless he or she holds a license, permit or authorization issued (South African Government, 2001). The estimated total number of guns (both licit and illicit) held by civilians is estimated at 5,352,000 (Gunpolicy.org, 2017). On average 58 people are murdered on a daily basis in South Africa. The murder rate has increased by 35% over the past seven years (ISS, 2019).

Data and Methods

Multiple sources of data were used for a study on family homicides, beginning on January 1, 1990 through October 1, 2019. This broader study was used to select cases related to parricides. Both completed and attempted parricides were included, which is consistent with practices of prior researchers (Weisman & Sharma, 1997). While this conflation may appear to be conceptually, methodologically, and analytically unsound, there are compelling reasons to operationalize both as one act. Previous works have shown that homicide as a lethal outcome is shaped by chance factors such as the availability of medical assistance rather than malicious intent (Monkkonen, 2001).

Previous studies suggest that newspapers constitute a valid and reliable source of information about a homicide when access to official records is difficult (author). As there is no centralized database for criminal justice records in South Africa, we utilized a data triangulation strategy for validation purposes. First, true crime books were consulted to find cases identified by previous writers. Two books that were compiled by a psychologist (Pistorius, 2004) and crime reporter (Van der Spuy, 2015) on murder were consulted for possible inclusion. Second, court records of completed judgements were used as official sources. These were drawn from JUTASTAT, a database for completed court judgements in South Africa. Cases were classified

¹ While this term may seem inappropriate in North American and European contexts, this term is the official one designated for those who are in 'mixed race' categories. However, the term 'mixed' is offensive in a South African context. Therefore, a term that reflects the accepted and normative practices in South Africa have been consistently adopted.

under the heading ‘sentencing reports’ from the subheadings ‘murder’ and ‘child offender’. The JUTASTAT database was searched as the court proceedings gave detailed accounts of the murders. A search of this official database resulted in 11 parricides cases and archival documents related to its adjudication. After this official record search was conducted, open-sources were searched to supplement the court records and cases identified from books.

Third, newspaper articles were collected through the search engine Google. Cases were retrieved by searching the phrases ‘murder’, ‘family murder’ and ‘parricide’. This type of methodology has been successfully used by a number of previous researchers (Adinkrah, 2017; Boots & Heide, 2006; Fegadel & Heide, 2017; Govender, 2015; Liem & Reichelmann, 2014). The use of newspapers to study murder has been an accepted methodology, especially in countries where there are no national criminal justice databases (Adinkrah, 2014, 2017, 2018) or during historical periods where newspapers constituted the most accessible centralized repository of information about crime in a community (Sharpe, 2012). Due to the violent nature of the act, family-related murders often receive extensive media coverage (Liem & Reichelmann, 2014; Adinkrah, 2014); it was therefore possible to identify family-related murders using this open source methodology (Parkin & Gruenwald, 2015). Our study identified 127 incidents of homicides within the family; of these, 46 incidents (36%) were parricide cases.

While three sources were consulted to identify cases, two sources—court records and newspapers—were the primary source of narrative data and the sequences of actions related to the crime. All the cases were initially read without preconceived categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2008); the data were then sorted according to a coding instrument containing 18 variables, and entered into a database.

In addition to variables such as age, sex, and race of victims and offenders, three key variables were selected for scrutiny. Although the principal criterion needed for the classification of parricides is determined by the relationship of the victim to the offender in a South African context, knowing the intent embedded in the offense, the weapons used, and what the victims and offenders were fighting about which resulted in death are important variables that shape the total context of parricide. Previous studies indicate that there is convergence validity in the emic factors related to parricide in disparate archival sources of data, even when only three key variables such as weapon, intent, and source of conflict are analysed (Shon & Lee, 2016).

Prior researchers have shown that the context of parricides is inextricably tied to the way the crime originated, weapons used, and the level of intent that is embedded in the offense (Shon, 2009). Therefore, the parricide was coded as being (1) “premeditated” if the offender planned the crime in advance; (2) “spontaneous” if the parricide occurred without prior planning and originated from the on-going social interaction; (3) accidental if the killing was an accident and (4) “unknown” if intent could not be identified. The weapons used in the parricides were coded in the following way: (1) knife/sharp object; (2) firearm; (3) axe; (4) hands & feet; (5) poison; (6) multiple weapons; (7) other; and (9) unknown.

Ethnicity and race of the offenders and victims were constructed by using the offender’s last name, photographs and area of residence. Surnames and area of residence are fairly distinct indicators of race within the South African context.

The source of conflict was coded as being related to (1) “defense” if the parricide originated out of a defense for another family member. The source of conflict was coded (2) “long term finance” if the dispute was related to inheritance and (3) “short term finance” if it was related to for instance a robbery or spending money. The source of conflict was coded (4) “argument” if the parricide originated from a trivial verbal dispute; (5) “cover up a crime” was

coded if the murder was committed to cover up another crime, while (6) “disciplinary” was coded if the parent disciplined the child and as result the murder was committed; (7) “jealousy” was coded if the murder originated from a jealous act against a parent and/or family member for instance a brother or sister. The source of conflict was coded as (8) “abuse” and (9) “mental illness” if the official report or newspaper article imputed the source of conflict as such. In some cases, the source of conflict was coded as (10) “other” when not related to the above; in 11% of the cases the source of conflict was (11) “unknown.”

Using newspaper and official documents has a number of limitations. The 46 parricide cases do not necessarily represent an exhaustive list of parricides over a period of 30 years in South Africa. Although an attempt was made to capture as much information as possible by using a coding instrument, the study was limited by what was reported in the newspapers and court documents. However, content analysis of newspaper articles gives the reader a historical glimpse on social life and normative patterns of a particular society and the descriptions can be analysed as units of behavioral analysis (Shon, 2009). In the sections below, we provide an overview of the general characteristics of parricide in South Africa.

Results

From 1990-2019, 46 incidents of attempted and/or completed parricides were identified. Thirty nine of the 72 victims were female. Twenty-nine (83%) mothers, 2 (6%) stepmothers, 3 (9%) grandmothers and 1 (3%) aunt was murdered in parricide incidents. In 27 (77%) of the 35 reported cases of female victims, the offenders lived with the victims. In 3 (9%) incidents the offenders lived elsewhere and in five (14%) the living arrangements could not be determined.

Twelve offenders were women. The average age of female offenders was 19 years. The youngest offender was 12 and the oldest 31 years. The average age for victims was 51 years. The youngest victim was 3 months old and the oldest 67 years. The female offender parricides were overwhelmingly premeditated. Nine (75%) of the murders were premeditated and 3 (25%) were spontaneous. Knives were used in 5 (42%) of the murders committed by females, followed by firearms (17%), multiple weapons (17%), other weapons (17%), and hands and feet (8%). In the sections below, we provide a qualitative analysis of the notable offense and offender characteristics related to female victims and offenders in South African parricides.

Incident Characteristics

Parricide type

Parricide incidents where women were killed unfolded in two ways. In the first, they were the principal victims who were directly targeted in the killings; mothers, aunts, and grandmothers were the primary targets in the killings in about a third of the cases. In 37% of the incidents, however, women were killed as part of multiple victim parricides where they were present as witnesses and audiences to the initial killing that was directed at fathers. Women thus made up a bulk of the victims as primary and secondary targets in parricides.

Table 1

Female Victim Parricides

Parricide Type (n=35)

Type	Number of cases	Percent
Son kills mother	11	31
Son kills both	13	37
Daughter kills mother	3	9
Daughter kills both	2	6
Stepson kills stepmother	1	3
Stepdaughter kills stepmother	1	3
Son kills grandmother	1	3
Son kills both grandparents	1	3
Daughter kills grandmother	1	3
Son kills aunt	1	3

As offenders, daughters killed their mothers in 9% of the murders and both their parents in 6% of the incidents. Stepparent parricides committed by a stepchild made up about 6% of the cases; in one incident a stepson killed his stepmother and in another a stepdaughter killed her stepmother. Four incidents involved offenders who killed a superordinate elder, such as a grandparent, and an aunt. Overall, women who killed parents and other elderly relatives made up about 21% of the offenders; the overwhelming majority of the offenders (79%) were men.

Race

Although Black Africans make up 80.7% of the population, they represented just 8% of the parricide cases committed by females; female victims, however, made up 31% of victims. Whites in South Africa account for 7.9% of the total population, but committed 58% of the parricides; white women were victims in 41% of the incidents.

Table 2

Female Parricide Offender Race

(n=12)

Race	Number of offenders	Percent
Black African	1	8
White	7	58
Coloured	1	8
Asian	2	17
Unknown	1	8

The number of murders committed by the Coloured population (10%) and the victims killed in those incidents were fairly consistent with their proportion within the population (8.8%).

Source of conflict

The sources of conflict—reasons that led to the killing of parents—diverged in relation to the victim and offender characteristics. Domestic arguments made up the largest source of conflict that resulted in the deaths of female victims (29%). In 20% of the cases the source of conflict could not be determined. Abuse (14%) and other sources of conflict (14%) made up the third largest groups. In 6% of the cases the source of conflict was related to covering up a crime, while in 2 cases (6%) disciplinary acts were stated as source of conflict.

Table 3
Female Victim Source of Conflict
Source of conflict (n = 35)

Source of conflict	Number of incidents	Percent
In defense of another	0	0
Long term finance	1	3
Short term finance	1	3
Domestic argument	10	29
Cover up crime	2	6
Disciplinary	2	6
Jealousy	1	3
Abuse	5	14
Mental illness	1	3
Other	5	14
Unknown	7	20

The Asian/Indian population of South Africa is estimated at 2.6%; however, Asian offenders committed 17% of the parricides and made up 15% of the victims. (insert table 3 about here)

A typical argument-related parricide began when a parent attempted to impose limits on the offspring’s behavior. Consider the following case:

Excerpt 1 (Court document, 2013)

An 18-year old female and her boyfriend strangled her mother shortly after an argument between mother and daughter. They argued about the daughter’s involvement with the boyfriend. The daughter hugged her mother and apologized for arguing with her when her boyfriend moved in to strangle the mother from behind.

Excerpt 1 illustrates a common way in which mothers were killed in arguments that were related to their attempts to impose discipline and meddle in the affairs of their offspring. In excerpt 1, the bone of contention between the mother and daughter arises in relation to the daughter’s choice of a romantic partner, and as the mother tries to interfere in the daughter’s autonomous decision-making. This disagreement leads to an argument which then escalates into

a fight. And consistent with the literature, the daughter kills her mother with the help of her boyfriend.

Differences emerged in incidents where women were the offenders. Abuse made up the most common source of conflict between parents and female offenders (42%), followed by domestic arguments. In 1 (8%) of the cases mental illness was stated as the source of conflict. There was 1 (8%) incident where the murder was committed in defense of another family member. In 1(8%) incident the source of conflict was due to other or unknown reasons. Consider the following case of abuse:

Excerpt 2 (Book, 2004)

A 19-year old daughter shot her father after years of physical and verbal abuse. The girl was denied a normal life by being trained to become a highly efficient soldier, from an early age. The months before the murder the girl was chained to a bed and only unchained to go for meals and to use the bathroom. She shot her father on her way to the kitchen to fetch a glass of water.

Table 4
Female Offender Source of Conflict
(n = 12)

Source of conflict	Number of incidents	Percent
In defense of another	1	8
Long term finance	0	0
Short term finance	0	0
Domestic argument	4	33
Cover up crime	0	0
Disciplinary	0	0
Jealousy	0	0
Abuse	5	42
Mental illness	1	8
Other	1	8
Unknown	0	0

Women who were abused were prominently represented as offenders in the current study. They were reported to have been abused physically, sexually, and emotionally in the archival sources of data used for this study. The prolonged abuse suffered at the hands of perpetrators, or women who turned a blind eye to the abuse suffered resulted in killings that were directed against the perpetrators or those who failed to protect them from abuse.

The socially organized character of contractual parricides

A total of 12 incidents involved female offender parricides. In 6 (50%) of the female perpetrated murders the offenders acted alone. However, in the remaining half of the incidents, female offenders received assistance in the killings. In 3 (25%) of the incidents the offender had assistance from a friend or boyfriend, while in 3 (25%) other murders the offenders hired someone to commit the murders for them.

Table 5

Female Offender Assisted by a Second Offender
(*n*=12)

	Number of offenders	Percent
Hired murderer	3	25
Friend/Boyfriend	3	25
Acted alone	6	50
Unknown	0	0

The following incident involving a 22-year old female who hired a hitman to murder her mother illustrates the socially organized character of murder-for-hire in parricide cases.

Excerpt 3 (Court document, 2002)

The daughter's parents divorced when she was 4 years old. Her mother was a successful businesswoman who worked long hours. The mother was described as hard. Family said that the mother often spoke deprecatingly to her daughter. The mother apparently regulated her daughter's life and rarely allowed her to undertake any activities on her own. She once told the daughter that her father did not love her. Her father described the mother as "overwhelming, dominating and possessive" The daughter was sexually abused by three different men when she was between 8 and 12 years old. She had told her mother about it, but her mother had said it was all lies and that she was just craving attention. She was still at school when she fell pregnant. Her mother forced her to have an abortion.

Months before the murder, mother and daughter often argued and the relationship deteriorated to such an extent that she hired a man to kill her mother. One evening during an informal conversation at the cricket club that the daughter managed, her boyfriend suggested she hire a hitman. He assisted her to get in contact with a man who was willing to commit the crime. On the day of the murder, the daughter picked up the man and took him to the house. She waited in the other room while he strangled her mother and slit her throat. After the murder, she gave the man the car keys and reported her car stolen to the police. Shortly thereafter, the man was arrested for the murder. He confessed that the daughter had paid him to commit the murder. She was arrested and received a 35-year sentence for her part in the murder.

There are several notable characteristics of how the contract killing of a parent is socially organized. First, although the rarity of using a hitman or a contact killer has been noted in the parricide literature (Shon, 2009, 2016), how such arrangements are initiated, negotiated, and managed as a sociological process has been overlooked. While popular representations of contract killings tend to be stereotypes of professional killers who appear out of the blue or in mysterious ways (Rafter, 2006), our data indicate that hiring a hitman to perform the work of killing a parent emerges from an already existing social network in ways that draw upon preexisting gender roles and cultural scripts.

In excerpt 3 and other cases in our data, the idea of killing a parent originates in a social milieu where the women shared their stories of victimization with others. In excerpt 3, the female offender narrates her prior history of victimization and troublesome upbringing to her boyfriend while on an outing at a social club. Thus, the telling of her story unfolds in a social

interaction that has the potential to be “heard” in numerous ways by an audience in a way that advances the teller’s intentions (Ewick & Silbey, 1995).

Second, the solicitation of murder does not begin with direct request to kill the target. Rather, the process is initiated in a social way by narrating her woes to an interested listener, as would typically happen in a tavern or a counseling session. By telling her story of victimization, the girl performs her role as a woman who needs to be rescued from an evil captor in a cultural script of a ‘damsel-in-distress’ narrative (Degloma, 2014). The process of soliciting a murder-for-hire entails the enactment of traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

Third, by discursively framing her upbringing as a victimization narrative, the female offender implicitly enlists her boyfriend’s help through her performance of her role as a victim; the telling of the story of victimization leads to its uptake in the recipient and functions as a causal narrative in her offending behavior (Presser, 2009). Upon hearing such tales of a damsel-in-distress, the boyfriend performs his role as a problem solver: by proposing a solution to her problem, he becomes a ‘knight-in-shining armor’ who comes to her rescue. It is the reflexive performance of such gender roles that enables the solicitation of murder in parricide incidents to unfold. The presence of third figures and the culturally available gender scripts facilitate the contractual killing of parents as a socially organized process (Zerubavel, 2003).

Discussion and Conclusion

Using court records, books and newspapers as data, this paper has examined female parricide victims and offenders in South Africa. To date, our study is the first to systematically examine victim and offender characteristics related to female parricides in South Africa. There are notable characteristics that warrant additional commentary.

The nature and culture of violence in South Africa merits discussion. Historically the culture of violence has persisted. During the *apartheid* era violence was seen as a product of the people’s protest against the racist regime, it was deemed legitimate and inevitable by all. The acceptance of violence on a political level made it easy to move down to social and cultural levels because of the weak traditional family structures. Violence in the home became common and over time it was integrated within the culture that persisted within South African society (Pandey, 2012; Scorgie et al., 2017). Structural inequality, socio-cultural tolerance of violence, militarized masculinity, disrupted community and family life and the erosion of social capital are stated as South Africa’s pathway to violence, while wide spread poverty, violent expressions of masculinity and drug abuse, especially alcohol abuse are cited as some of the causes of domestic violence (Mncana & Okeke in Taukeni, 2019). The subculture of violence theory posits that violence is the product to conformity to a pro-violent subculture (Erlanger, 1974). By conforming to this subculture, violence becomes intertwined within the fiber of everyday life. It was evident that domestic arguments (29%) and abuse (14%) were the two biggest sources of conflict. Abuse is deemed a violent act (Hoff, 2009), domestic- and trivial arguments are not necessarily violent acts, but arguments in this study were resolved violently. One example in the study relates to a 12 year old girl, after years of abuse and neglect, approached two strangers on the street to murder her grandmother. In exchange, she offered them household goods and sexual favors. Testimony that violence is intertwined in daily life is the fact that two strangers were willing to commit murder for relatively insignificant payment and a young girl who deemed the informal contracting of two strangers as the solution to her problems. In excerpt 3 the informal, socially organized nature of murder is apparent. Finding a person to commit murder was

relatively simple, especially after the offender shared her story of victimization to a sympathetic party.

In the same vein, poverty merits discussion. It is possible that the epidemic levels of violence is linked to widespread poverty in South Africa. As noted before, 49.2% of the adult population live below the upper-bound poverty line (Statistics South Africa, 2019) and a third of the population lives on social grants (Rossouw, 2017). In three of the cases in the current study, the female offenders contracted murderers in fairly simple and informal ways. In all three cases there was no pre-arranged monetary incentive. In excerpt 3 the female offender simply gave the hitman her vehicle and in the other two cases household goods were offered as payment. Contract killers commit murder predominantly for financial reasons (Wilson & Rahman, 2015; Calhoun, 2002), which makes these findings significantly different from known literature on contract killings. In three of the 12 cases a boyfriend or partner assisted with the murders, stepping in as problem solvers and ‘saviors’ of ‘damsels-in-distress’. Therefore, one can postulate that although the soliciting of murder-for-hire entails the enactment of traditional gender roles and stereotypes, factors such as poverty, the socially organized nature of murder and a culture of violence are equally important factors to consider.

One particularly notable finding in the current study was in relation to race and parricide. In this study the fact that Whites are disproportionately represented even in non-random samples suggest that residential and sociological patterns may configure in notable ways in parricidal incidents in South Africa. White households tend to be nuclear household (Sooryanoorthy & Makhoba, 2016)). Parents and their offspring may come into frequent contact as part of their routine activities that entangle them in domestic conflicts that are resolved through the use of violence. Black African parents, on the other hand, may not prominently appear as victims in parricides because a significant portion of them are absent in households (Smit, 2001), therefore removed from the daily conflicts that occur. Traditionally there is a consensus that fathers have to take care of everyone and everything (Falkof, 2013). In some traditional White families sons are taught that gentleness and kindness are feminine attributes that should be avoided and are often socialized to be domineering and hide their feelings. Within the patriarchal system the family is also regarded as a private institution in which outsiders are not allowed to interfere (Van der Hoven, 1988). It is established in the literature that men in general kill their intimate partners as extension of their prior violence, as a form of patriarchal communication that reiterate women’s subordinate status (Haag, 1992; Elisha et al., 2010). Therefore, one might argue that sons who conform to a patriarchal system and are socialized to hide familial problems, might endeavor to resolve their problems through violence within the confines of the home environment. Findings indicated that women made up the bulk of primary and secondary targets of parricide. In this study, males were responsible for murdering female victims in 24 (69%) of the 35 reported cases. White males were responsible for eight (80%) of the 10 cases of multiple murders. Although we have not directly examined male perpetrated violence or the impact of post-apartheid era sensibilities on Whites in South Africa, it warrants mentioning and should be investigated in more depth in future studies.

Abuse as source of conflict that resulted in murder was noted in 42% of the female perpetrated cases. Abuse is often stated as the cause of female perpetrated parricide (Moen, 2017; Pretorius & Morgan, 2013). When women kill, they do so in the context of interpersonal or domestic violence (Pretorius & Morgan, 2013). As noted before women murder for defensive reasons, often killing to protect themselves from imminent assaults (Belknap et al., 2012; Browne, 1987). Failure to be protected by a parent or caregiver early in life can result in feelings

of rage and hatred towards a parent (Heide, 2019). Females who live in isolation from family, who are often scolded or threatened by parents are at risk of committing parricide (Pretorius & Morgan, 2013). In 10 (83%) of the 12 cases of parricide perpetrated by females, neglect and/or abuse was apparent. In 11 of the 12 reported cases the parent/s failed to protect the female from either physical-, emotional- or sexual abuse. Excerpt 2 is an example of unbearable abuse at the hands of a father that resulted in patricide. In this case, the mother did not protect the daughter, but assisted the father in abusing the daughter.

To our knowledge we have conducted one of the first systematic studies of female parricide in South Africa, our study has several shortcomings. First, our study is not randomized or a complete universe of parricide incidents in a jurisdiction. It is a convenience sample based on a limited number of court cases and newspaper reports. For future works, it may be worthwhile to obtain a complete record of all homicides as the denominator and parricides as numerators so that an accurate percentage of the total number of cases could be calculated. Second, it may be a worthwhile project to carry out studies relating to race specific parricides and the social nature of contract killings to examine the unique influences at play.

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