

“High-Risk Victims”.

Homicide in Relationships: Convictions 2008-2010

Summary

For this report all convictions for (attempted) homicide/femicide from 2008 to 2010 have been analysed: 39 trials against male and eight trials against female perpetrators.

In 21 cases the court proceedings against **men** ended with convictions for (attempted) murder, in seven cases for manslaughter. In seven more cases the psychiatric expertise attested that the perpetrator had been mentally disturbed to an extent that required his internment. Three other men were found guilty of less severe offences, and a young man committed suicide before the court proceedings were closed.

What are the characteristics of the murders that were attempted or accomplished? The risk of becoming a victim of a femicide committed by a (former) partner is especially high,

- if there has been a history of violence in this relationship;
- if the woman wants to separate from her partner;
- if the partner is jealous;
- for migrants respectively for women living in binational relationships; and
- for women whose partners are unemployed (or — although to a lesser extent — whose partners are (early) retirees), especially when these women are working.

A **history of violence** was on file for more than half of the court proceedings; most cases concerned entrenched violence, sometimes over decades. Only five perpetrators had been convicted previously for violent acts. Eight women had been in contact with an **intervention centre** respectively a violence protection centre before the attack — this is only about one third of the women who had experienced partner violence before. The small number of **police interventions** and interim injunctions prior to the attack shows that high-risk victims do not or hardly ever use the instruments provided by the Protection against Violence Act. In case of police interventions, victims often tried to trivialize acts of violence and to protect their partners. It is well known that women living in violent relationships pursue such strategies, and therefore police are required to intervene with caution.

At the time of the attack, in many cases the woman had left her partner or at least announced that she wanted to separate. This fact underlines what is well known from studies on partner violence: the risk of massive violence is especially high in the phase of separation. More than two thirds of femicides were related to the actual or imagined **end of a relationship** where **jealousy and possessive mentality** played an important role.

Apart from the risk factors already mentioned, there are two more conspicuous features. On the one hand, nearly one fifth of the crimes was committed by men for whom a serious mental abnormality had been attested, what lead to internment in an institution for **mentally disturbed offenders**. On the other hand, in four out of 39 cases the perpetrator had threatened his partner or other persons to commit **suicide**. As this study could not include (for methodological reasons) cases of femicide-suicide, one has to be aware of the fact that there are considerably more perpetrators who announced suicide and subsequently committed femicide-suicide.

18 women were killed, 21 survived.

In one of **eight** cases the court proceedings against **women** ended with a conviction for murder and in another case for negligent homicide under particularly dangerous circumstances. Five perpetrators were sentenced for (intentional) aggravated assault; for three of them the penalties were completely or partially suspended. In one case the woman was found legally insane.

The acts of violence committed by women occurred in entirely different contexts to those committed by men. Although caution should be exercised due to the small sample, it has become evident that in relationships with a history of violence the women's partners had also been violent before. On the contrary, this was rarely the case with male perpetrators. Jealousy or her partner's intention to separate did not lead to disputes or acts of violence. Other than male perpetrators for whom **alcohol** played a smaller role than expected, two thirds of the female offenders were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the attack.

In a **typical case** of partner violence committed by a woman the offender would be a woman who has been living in a violent partnership with aggressions from both sides. He and she are drunk in their common apartment, his violent behaviour leads to a dispute, and he wants to leave the apartment. She is furious and attacks him with a kitchen knife. Afterwards she calls the police or the ambulance, shocked about her action's consequences which she has not considered before.

The most striking difference between acts of violence committed by women and those committed by men are the **deeds' consequences**: Two out of eight victims of women were killed, whereas almost one out of two victims of male perpetrators died.