

Key findings & IFAS recommendations

Strangulation Vs Sharp Instrument: A Comparative Analysis of 150 Domestic Homicide Reviews

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Victims

- There were 77 victims in the sharp instrument group, compared with 75 victims in the strangulation group.
- 74% of the sharp instrument victims were female, compared to 95% of the strangulation victims.
- The median age of victim in the sharp instrument group was 40 years, compared to 44 years in the strangulation group.
- Across both groups, the majority of victims were White, but a higher percentage of stabbing victims were Black and a higher percentage of strangulation victims were Asian.

Perpetrators

- There were 78 perpetrators in the sharp instrument group, and 77 perpetrators in the strangulation group.
- 91% of perpetrators in the sharp instrument group were male, compared with 96% in the strangulation group.
- The median age of stabbing perpetrators was 32 years, compared to 44 years in the strangulation group.
- The majority of perpetrators across both groups were White, but more stabbing perpetrators were Black and more strangulation perpetrators were Asian (compared with the other group).

Relationship and homicide circumstances

- 69% of the victim-perpetrator relationships in the sharp instrument group were current or former intimate partners, compared with 84% in the strangulation group.
- 59% of the intimate partner relationships in the sharp instrument group had ended (i.e. they had separated) by the time of the homicide, compared of 66% of the intimate partner relationships in the strangulation group.
- 6% of perpetrators in the sharp instrument group went on to take their own lives after the homicide, compared with 18% of strangulation perpetrators.

Prior domestic abuse

- Domestic abuse between the homicide victim and perpetrator was reported in 68% (53/77) of the sharp instrument group compared with 72% (54/75) of DHRs in the strangulation group.
- In 11% (6/53) of DHRs in the sharp instrument group, the prior domestic abuse reported in the DHR was perpetrated by the victim of the eventual homicide. There were no cases in the strangulation group where the victim of the homicide was the perpetrator of the abuse reported.

Prior domestic abuse (continued)

- 53% of victims who were killed by stabbing with a sharp instrument were reported to be experiencing coercive and controlling behaviours, compared with 68% of victims killed by strangulation.
- In 34% of DHRs with a history of domestic abuse in the sharp instrument group, non-fatal strangulation was reported prior to the homicide. This is compared with 59% of strangulation homicides where prior domestic abuse was noted.

Method

1. IFAS produced Report 3 in this DHR analysis series focused on homicide by strangulation. These cases were the comparators to the new cohort of homicide by stabbing with a sharp instrument.
2. IFAS researchers retrieved 75 cases of homicide by stabbing with a sharp instrument for the Home Office DHR online library.
3. The new cohort of 75 cases were cross-matched to the strangulation cases by date. They were otherwise a random sample.
4. As per the other analyses in this series, the features of these DHRs were extracted. They were then compared with the same features from the fatal strangulation cohort.

IFAS Summary and Recommendations

The largest observable differences when comparing homicides by strangulation and homicides by stabbing with a sharp instrument were:

- Victim sex
- Perpetrator median age
- Prior non-fatal strangulation, coercive and controlling behaviour & psychological/emotional abuse
- Perpetrator self-harm/ suicide post-homicide.

More research is to be done to better understand and, ultimately, be able to prevent future harm and death. Two suggestions for future research projects have been provided below.

- Future research with regard to how domestic abuse behaviour in relationships could influence a trajectory of further abuse or potentially homicide for the victim.
- Future research into how perpetrators 'select' a method of killing and their subsequent actions. For instance: Is there a link between strangulation as a method of killing and perpetrators taking their own lives?

