

# FEMALE OFFENDER PARRICIDES: THE ASYMMETRICAL DISTRIBUTION OF HOMICIDE FOR PARENTS AND STEPPARENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*Research suggests that parricides parallel other homicides in that they too »uctuate with shifts in social structure and patterns. Research also suggests that their declination is largely attributable to the decrease in homicides committed by juvenile males. Absent from the literature, however, is an examination of parricides committed by female offenders. In this study, we use the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR) to examine the parricides committed by females in the U.S. from 1976 to 1999. Our analyses reveal two noteworthy findings: (1) consanguineous relationship does not necessarily mitigate violence and (2) parents do not face the greatest risk of homicide in their eldest years, as evolutionary psychology of violence suggests.*

**Key words:** Parricide, female offenders

## INTRODUCTION

While patricide and matricide respectively refer to the murder of one's father and mother, the term parricide has also been used to describe the killing of one's close relatives and kings (Heide, 1992). And although parricide has been the topic of research in the psychological sciences (Millaud et al., 1996; Weisman and Sharma, 1997), a cursory review of the literature reveals that the principal thrust of research has been generally directed toward male offenders (e.g., Campion et al., 1985). When homicides involving female offenders have been investigated, research has usually been limited to intimate-partner homicides and infanticides (see Brown, 1987; Brown and Williams, 1993; Ogle et al., 1995; Jensen, 2001; Walker, 1989, 2000). Thus, little attention has been paid to parricides committed by female offenders. This article seeks to fill in that void.

We used the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR) to examine parricides committed by female offenders in the United States from 1976 to 1999. To illuminate the different classifications of parricide, and for the sake of clarity, this study used three acronyms to classify parricides in accordance with the sex of the offender and the victim: Female Offender Parricide (FOP), Female Offender Patricide (FOPat), and Female Offender Matricide (FOM). Specifically, we disaggregated FOPs based on variables such as age of victim and offender, relational categories (natural vs. stepparents), and weapon usage. By doing so, we investigated the tenability of one theory of homicide that has been particularly influential, evolutionary psychological theory of homicide (Daly and Wilson, 1988a). In the conclusion, the policy implications of our findings are discussed. We proffer specific policy recommendations to pre-