



Childhood Experiences As Potential Pathways To Filicide Offending

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Abstract

Filicide—the killing of a child by their parent—has largely been examined through a criminological lens, primarily relying on secondary data sources. While these sources offer important insights for understanding and preventing filicide, research has tended to concentrate mainly on the perpetrating parent's experiences in adulthood. Childhood experiences of filicide offenders from a psychological perspective are rarely discussed as possible pathways to murder. Filicide offenders' childhood experiences are often characterised by multiple adversities which can include abuse and neglect. Adverse childhood experiences have negative physical and mental health outcomes throughout the lifespan. In this study we illuminate the filicide offender's childhood experiences to highlight the contextual challenges that are associated with these crimes. Findings from interviews with filicide offenders from South African and eSwatini will be presented. Although this study cannot draw a causal link, it appears that childhood exposure to adversity amplifies the likelihood of negative outcomes such as poly-violence and criminality, in adulthood. We therefore propose early intervention strategies in schools and communities to mitigate the risks of violent offending later in life.

Keywords: murder; childhood adversity; child murder; abuse; contextual challenges