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Date

Global Systematic Review: Child Murder from
the Perspective of Perpetrators

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Psychology,
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Abstract

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Child murder continues to be a growing public health problem. The purpose of this systematic review is to synthesize the literature on child murder perpetration from the perspective of perpetrators. Our team searched five databases utilizing terms related to child murder, including filicide and perpetrators (e.g., mother). There were no limits on geography, date of publication, or study design. We included articles in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. The final search resulted in 2,612 after removing duplicates. Exclusion criteria were employed to the 65 articles in full text review, which left us with 8 articles total for extraction. The studies took place mostly in incarcerated settings (n=6), but others took place in various psychiatric and clinical settings (n=2). All articles took a qualitative approach (n=8) which primarily encompassed semi-structured interviews (n=5). Perpetrators biographical factors, gender differences, and societal barriers were common themes across these studies. Female perpetrators were held to higher expectations than male perpetrators when it came to caregiving. Structural factors, including strict gender roles, were not discussed at length even though female perpetrators were the predominant population amongst the studies. This study emphasized the need for more robust theories and methodologies to understand the perspectives of perpetrators of this crime. Understanding perpetrators' motivations and rationality regarding the crime will aid in future prevention efforts in the elimination of violence against children.

Keywords: Child Murder, Infanticide, Filicide, Fatal Child Maltreatment, Violence

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Glossary of Terms

Infanticide: the deliberate killing of an infant under one year old

Filicide: the murder of a child by a parent

Fatal Child Maltreatment: the death of a child because of abuse or neglect

Neonaticide: the killing of an infant within its first four weeks of life

INTRODUCTION

Filicide, the murder of a child by a parent, is a frequent cause of child mortality (Debowska et al., 2015). The term filicide is often used interchangeably with terms *neonaticide*, the killing of an infant within the first four weeks of life, *infanticide*, the deliberate killing of an infant under one year old, and *fatal child maltreatment*, the death of a child as a result of abuse or neglect (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021; Debowska et al., 2015; Raymond et al., 2021; Resnick, 1969, 1970; Ross & Juarez, 2014). The distinctions amongst these terms generally reflect age differences in the victims. Over the years, researchers have agreed that filicide contributes significantly to pediatric mortality at the global level (Adinkrah, 2003; Jason et al., 1983). The *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime* estimates that, between the years 2008-2017, 205,153 children, ages 0-14 were killed as a result of homicide; mainly perpetrated by family members (UNODC, 2019). Among the many factors that contribute to infant mortality each year, homicide has steadily ranked as the second leading cause of injury-related death in infants (Salihu et al., 2021). In Malaysia, “baby hatches” exist to prevent child murder where newborn babies can be placed anonymously in specific locations (Razali et al., 2018). In the U.S., Safe Haven laws are passed in all 50 states that permit parents to leave babies at a hospital or fire station without fear of prosecution (Friedman & Friedman, 2010).

Historically, child murder has been attributed to maternal figures (Adinkrah, 2003; Baralic et al., 2010; Champion et al., 1988; Smithey, 1997; Tanaka et al., 2017), though it is important to note that there have been instances where this notion has been assumed rather than empirically ascertained (Razali et al., 2018; Spinelli, 2001; Tursz & Cook, 2011). As women tend to be the primary caretakers of children, they have are predisposed to parenting stressors, including financial instability and lack of child support (Adinkrah, 2003). As a result, neonaticide has been linked specifically to women due to the gendered nature of childcare (Mariano et al., 2014; Razali et al., 2018; Tursz &

Cook, 2011). Moreover, gender norms dictate responsibility for mothers in the everyday care of their children (Razali et al., 2018).

Typically, younger, first-time mothers, and unmarried women are the primary focus across the literature (Tanaka et al., 2017). Female perpetrators are more likely to be unemployed, have a reported relationship with violence, have killed less victims, and have a mental illness in comparison to male perpetrators (Kauppi et al., 2010; Eriksson et al., 2016; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008; Razali et al., 2018). Consequently, a gap has emerged in the study of paternal figures. Fathers have been linked to filicide later in life (Kunz & Bahr, 1996). Male perpetrators are more likely to have drug and alcohol dependency as well as a variety of personality disorders (Eriksson et al., 2016; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008; Kauppi et al., 2010; Razali et al., 2018). Yet, filicide has also been found equally as likely to be committed by both men and women, in some cases even more by men where there were older child victims (Brookman & Nolan, 2006; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008; Razali et al., 2018).

Reviews in the past have utilized evidence of case reports from mental hospitals, prison psychiatrists, other psychiatrists, and coroner's offices. With a pool of 43 paternal filicide perpetrators and 88 maternal filicide perpetrators, Resnick developed one of the earliest frameworks for understanding infanticide motives pulling from 155 case reports (Resnick, 1969). The classifications include: altruistic, acutely psychotic, unwanted child, accidental, and spouse revenge filicide providing understanding of the motives for murder (*Figure 1*) (Adinkrah, 2003; Marleau et al., 1999; Resnick, 1969). According to Resnick's research, almost 50% of the filicides he reviewed would be considered "altruistic" filicides (Moodley et al., 2019; Resnick, 1969).

Figure 1. Resnick Filicide Classification Table

Classification Term	Definition
<p>“Altruistic” Filicide I. associated with suicide II. to relieve suffering</p>	<p>These murders were committed from a place of love and care.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. These parents could not fathom abandoning their children and often would make plans to kill themselves II. These parents killed their children to rid their children of the pain they may or may not have been enduring
<p>“Acutely Psychotic” Filicide</p>	<p>These murders occurred as perpetrators were hallucinating or experiencing epilepsies or delirium.</p>
<p>“Unwanted Child” Filicide</p>	<p>These murders occurred because of the child no longer being wanted by the parent.</p>
<p>“Accidental” Filicide</p>	<p>These murders involve the extreme result of child maltreatment that may have stemmed from a violent outburst.</p>
<p>“Spouse Revenge” Filicide</p>	<p>These murders occur when parents want “revenge” on their partner ending with the murder of their child.</p>

D’Orbán (1979), later took these categories, as well as Scott’s (1973) classifications, and differentiated them amongst maternal filicide cases (D’Orbán, 1979; McKee & Egan, 2013). The five categories derived from their work included: (i) mentally ill women who commit the crime because of acute psychosis; (ii) retaliating women who seek revenge against a partner; (iii) the rejection of an unwanted child; (iv) to stop a child’s perceived suffering; (v) “battering mothers” who accidentally kill their own children; (D’Orbán, 1979; McKee & Egan, 2013; Stanton & Simpson, 2006). D’Orbán’s modified model involved elements of both Scott and Resnick’s with slight modifications to capture the “impulsivity” that drives women to kill their own children (D’Orbán, 1979; Stanton & Simpson, 2006).

Child murder cannot be discussed without understanding the context of the cultural norms that facilitated these types of crimes. Research, generally, has typically been limited in non-English

speaking regions even though child murder is a global issue, leaving gaps in the literature on infanticide perpetration (Adinkrah, 2003; Stanton & Simpson, 2006). With most research focusing on maternal filicide or mothers convicted of child homicide, limited research on paternal filicide highlights another gap (Adinkrah, 2003; Alder & Baker, 1997; Smithey, 1997). Methodologically, researchers have historically relied on quantitative data from secondary data, including victim or perpetrator characteristics and theoretical implementation, as the primary avenue for research in this realm (Moodley et al., 2019). The predominant sources used to evaluate these crimes include judicial, police, psychiatric, autopsy records (Flynn et al., 2013; Gheorghe et al., 2011; Herman-Giddens et al., 2003; Liem & Koenraadt, 2008; Marcikić et al., 2006; Razali et al., 2018).

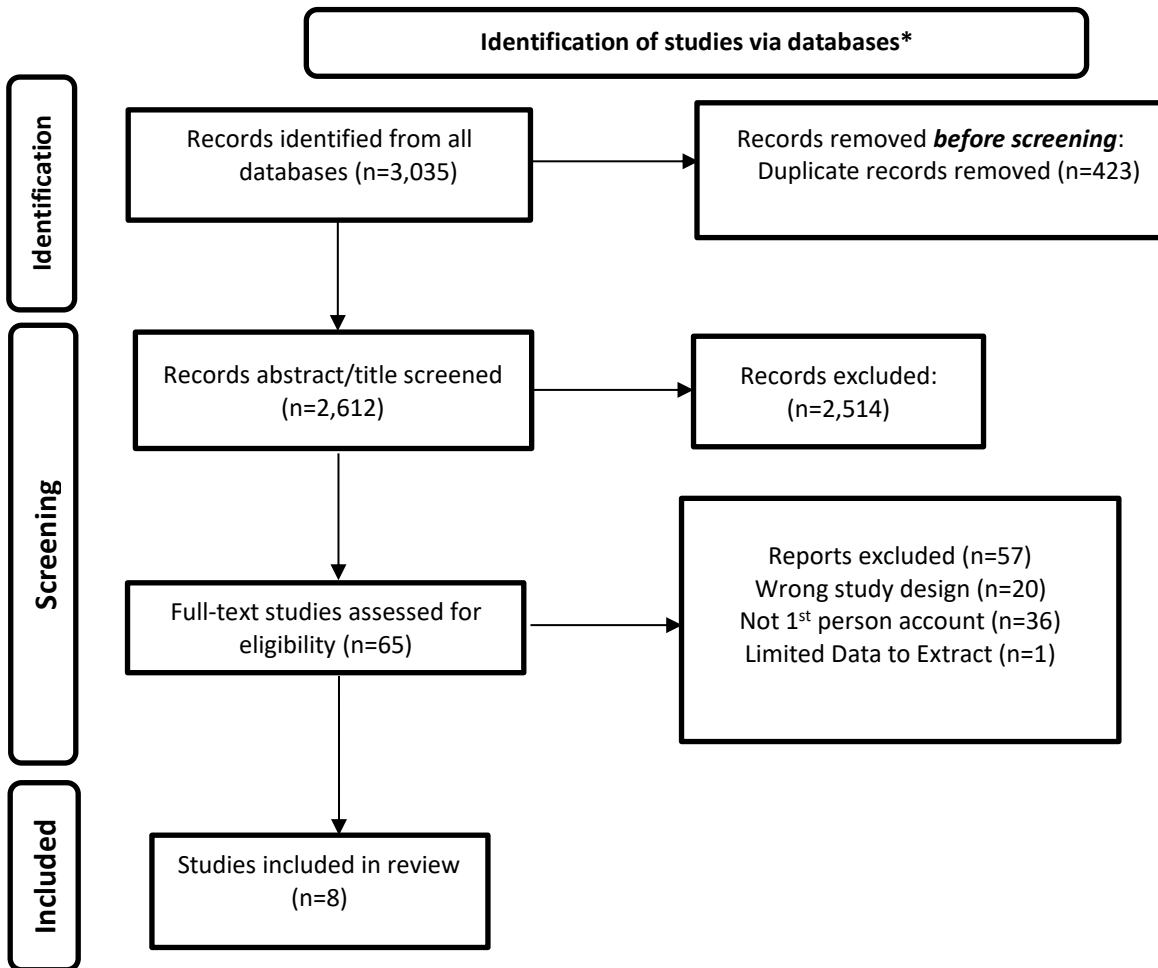
While secondary sources describe the victims and perpetrators, it is critical to understand the perspective and sensemaking of these individuals beyond their demographic characteristics, psychological and criminological profiles for the purposes of child murder. As there has been limited qualitative accounts capturing the motivation and sensemaking of this crime, researchers have called for different approaches to prevention. Therefore, the purpose of this systematic review was to synthesize the literature on child murder perpetration, including neonaticide, infanticide, and filicide from the perspective of perpetrators. As perpetrators are the drivers of this act, it is critical to ensure professionals across disciplines capture and understand their narratives from their own distinct realities.

METHODOLOGY

The population of interest for this systematic review includes perpetrators of child murders. This review included peer-reviewed studies of all design types written in Spanish, English, and Portuguese; these languages represented the language proficiency of our team. The review included primary research articles with no time constraints. To conduct this review, the team used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. This framework consists of the following: records from database searching identified, records removed after deduplication, records screened for relevance, full-text papers assessed for eligibility, qualitative and quantitative studies included in synthesis.

PubMed, Embase, PsycInfo, Web of Science Core Collection, and Scopus were the databases searched in this review; searches were conducted between October 26, 2021, until November 16, 2021. Search concepts included: 'infanticide'; 'child' and 'homicide'; 'filicide'; 'neonaticide'; 'neonaticide'; 'child'; 'juvenile'; 'sons'; 'daughters'; 'newborn'; 'baby'; 'toddler'; 'teen'; 'father'; 'mother'; 'parent'; 'caregiver'; 'babysitter'; 'babysitters'; 'stranger'; 'abuser'; 'perpetrators.' All results (n=3,035) from databases were downloaded as .txt files and uploaded into Covidence.

Figure 2. PRISMA Diagram



*Databases included: PubMed, Embase, PsychInfo, Web of Science Core Collection, and Scopus
 From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71
 For more information, visit: <http://www.prisma-statement.org/>

Once uploaded into Covidence 423 total duplicates were removed and 2,612 articles remained. Two team members independently assessed titles and abstracts utilizing inclusion and exclusion criteria. At this stage, included papers were those focused on child murder perpetration, including infanticide, filicide, and neonaticide perpetration. Excluded were papers focusing on experiences and narratives of victims of attempted child murder as well as any that did not encompass the primary perspectives of perpetrators. The team concentrated on primary data and

focused exclusively on perspectives of perpetrators and excluded papers that were not peer-reviewed.

After title and abstract review screening, the team discussed discordance, resolved conflicts, and refined the review criteria leaving 86 articles for full text review. At this phase, articles that were excluded included case-series studies that predominantly included secondary sources. The team included all types of child murders including fatal child maltreatment. Authors split up the full text review and eventually extracted data from eight articles. The first author extracted and synthesized the following information: publication year, purpose of the paper, primary or secondary data, instrument, specific setting and country, language utilized, cohort gender, crime classification, theoretical base, analytical method employed, population information, sample size, sampling strategy, instrument for data collection, main inquiries, and results.

RESULTS

We used qualitative content synthesis to identify common themes amongst all the studies, focusing on perpetrators' life trajectories. Though papers spanned four continents across North America, Australia, Asia, and Africa, all papers (n=8) were published in English.

Terminology and Theoretical Framework

Inevitably, terminology for child murder varied across countries, cultural settings, and disciplines. Smithey (1997) was the only paper that did not use the term filicide or fatal child maltreatment but instead chose to rely on "infant homicide." Amongst the rest of the articles, authors predominantly used filicide (n=4), fatal child maltreatment (n=2), and child homicide (n=1).

Though most of the articles stemmed from the discipline of psychology (n=7), a diverse range of theoretical frameworks were present. Dekel, Andipatin, & Abrahams (2020) was the only paper to use an ecological framework to decipher the results. They broke up findings into individual, family/relationship, community, and society levels (Dekel, Andipatin, & Abrahams, 2020). Razali et al. (2018) interpreted results using narrative theory, which encourages practitioners to view their participants as complex beings with diverse perspectives around the many meanings of life (Kirkman, 2002). (Stanton et al., 2006; Stanton & Simpson, 2006) utilized a naturalistic paradigm, allowing concepts to emerge from the interviews rather than employ a particular theory (Morse, 1994). Narrative theory was used in interpreting interviews with women convicted of filicide to grasp the individual and cultural complexities of the lives of these women (Razali et al., 2018; Kirkman, 2002). Dekel utilized attachment theory and epigenetics as well as ecological systems theory to ground their work in both papers (Dekel, Andipatin, Abrahams, 2020; Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin, 2018). Psychological theory was also embedded in the work of Smithey (1997), who employed social learning theory within their paper. Finally, Dekel, Andipatin, & Abrahams' (2020) paper also discussed

the cycle of violence theory, advancing the idea that people who were victimized as children grow up to victimize others.

In this systematic review neutralization theory was used to guide interpretation of studies. Neutralization theory was actualized by Sykes and Matza (1957) to understand perpetrators beyond their offending actions. The theory is used to acknowledge offending individuals as not deliberately deviant people but instead people who strive to be members of conventional society (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Furthermore, this neutralization theory came to pass through several studies observing perpetrators' perspectives and the justifications or rationalizations they seek that attempt to assuage guilt (Di Marco & Evans, 2020; Sykes & Matza, 1957; Topalli, 2005). Justifications inherently act as a means to relieve anticipated guilt within these stories, making these accounts, and these individuals, not adverse to societal exceptionalism.

Notably, Smithey (1997) employed a conceptual framework that included three domains which structured the pre-dispositional and precipitating factors of the interviews. The 'Social Learning Theory' domain of the framework included the following behaviors: disapproving parents, sexual abuse, substance abuse from perpetrators father, and antagonistic partner or husband (Smithey, 1997). Absence of spouse or intimate partner, and adverse living conditions are the predispositional factors that made up 'Economic Deprivation' within the framework. Lastly, self-attitudes, including emotional stress from the predispositional factors, lead to substance misuse by the participant ultimately leading to the fatal injury of a child. This framework encompassed the common themes across all the perpetrators' accounts.

Methodological Approaches

All eight articles (n=8) utilized a qualitative methodological approach. Prisons and psychiatric institutions made up many of the study settings (n=5). Only two studies had a mixed cohort of both

male and female perpetrators (Dekel, Andipatin, Abrahams, 2020; Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin, 2018). Two studies (Stanton et al., 2000; Stanton & Simpson, 2006), with clinician approval, conducted interviews in the homes of several mothers convicted of killing their children. Smithey (1997) extracted cases from medical examiners' office data in five counties within the state of Texas and cross-referenced police departments to locate offenders. Most authors collected data utilizing semi-structured and in-depth interviews (n=7), with the exception of Smithey (1997) who utilized "intensive interviewing" (see *Table 1*). Three authors employed thematic analysis, while others used inductive analysis (n=2), phenomenological analysis (n=1), and summative analysis (n=1).

Table 1. Eight Articles on Child Murder Perpetration from the Perspective of Perpetrators by Author and Publication Year

Author & Publication Year	Country	Data Source	Theoretical Base	Methodology Type	Participant Type	Analytical Approach	Journal Discipline
Dekel et al., 2020	South Africa	Primary	Ecological framework	Semi-structured interviews	Men and Women responsible for death of child (n=8 men; n=14 women)	Inductive Analysis	Psychology
Moodley et al., 2019	South Africa	Primary	Unspecified	Semi- structured interviews	Female filicide perpetrators (n=7)	Thematic Analysis	Psychology
Razali et al., 2018	Malaysia	Primary	Narrative Theory	In-depth interviews	Women convicted of filicide (n=9)	Interpretative phenomenological approach	Psychology
Dekel et al., 2018	South Africa	Primary	Attachment Theory & Epigenetics Theory	Semi-structured interviews	Men and Women responsible for death of child (n=8 men; n=14 women)	Inductive Analysis	Psychology
Stanton et al., 2000	New Zealand	Primary	Unspecified	Semi-structured interviews	Female filicide perpetrators (n=7)	Naturalistic Paradigm	Psychology
Stanton & Simpson, 2006	New Zealand	Primary	Unspecified	Semi-structured interviews	Female filicide perpetrators (n=7)	Naturalistic Paradigm	Psychology
Smithey, 1997	U.S.A.	Primary	Social Learning Theory	“Intensive interviewing”*	Female neonaticide perpetrators (n=15)	Unspecified	Psychology
Korbin, 1987	U.S.A.	Primary and Secondary	Unspecified	In-depth interview	Female perpetrators (n= 9)	Unspecified	Psychology

*= “defined as a guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used for qualitative analysis” (Smithey, 1997, p. 258)

Emerging Themes

Perpetrator's firsthand accounts were the focus of this study. Childhood experiences, gender differences, and societal barriers were among the topics highlighted in across the studies.

Predisposing Factors and Childhood Experiences

Studies looked intently at biographical backgrounds of perpetrator's, including their relationships with their parents or guardians. Biographical aspects of perpetrators' childhood were important in understanding the upbringing of these individuals but also how these past occurrences impacted perpetrators' present and future.

Enduring child abuse within the family was highlighted across three studies. Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin (2018) discussed parent-child relationships where one participant explained that her mother's abuse resulted in her *"rebellious behavior"* (Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin, 2018, p. 6-7). Another participant similarly reported that abuse endured at home being a result of misbehavior:

"My mommy used to throw me with boiling water and yoh she'd beat me" (Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin, 2018, p. 6). *"The stealing started when I was six years old. . . The beatings stopped when I got married at the age of 23, because I couldn't take it anymore. That was my scapegoat. To get married and to get out of the house, because I couldn't handle my mommy's abuse anymore"* (Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin, 2018, p. 6-7).

Studies (n=7) addressed themes of childhood adversities, particularly abuse, neglect, absent parents, sexual abuse, community, and parental violence. Sexual abuse was a significant theme across Smithey's (1997) participants. One perpetrator reported harrowing abuse from her father: *"He [her father] physically attacked me and sexually molested me while I was a teenage"* (Smithey, 1997, p. 262).

Participants addressed the intergenerational effects of witnessing trauma and violence within their own communities but most significantly in their own homes. Three studies (Razali et al., 2018; Dekel, Andipatin, Abrahams, 2020; Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin, 2018) brought in historical and

cultural aspects to cycles of violence within Malaysian and South African contexts. Dekel, Andipatin, & Abrahams (2020) considered that,

“the violent past of legalized, racial inequalities...is the foundation for the current levels of violence” (p. 2). One perpetrator, Adam, shared his experience in the apartheid-era South African army. In his interview he discussed having to kill a lot of people and that the army taught him to *“fight and not stop, just continue, doesn’t matter if it was a woman...or a young person...I’m taught to see nothing in front of me but the person I’m fighting and to hurt you”* (Dekel, Andipatin, & Abrahams, 2020 , p. 8).

Razali et al., (2018) observed the intersection between women’s oppression and religious. They discussed how Muslim participants *“ex-nuptial children are illegitimate and unmarried mothers are anathema”* (Razali et al., 2018, p.3). In their interviews, participants discussed not having access to controlling their fertility and family planning options, but there was an expectation in managing it.

Witnessing intimate partner violence amongst parental figures was also discussed amongst participants. Participants reported being desensitized to domestic violence in the household:

“He used to hit my mother in front of us, it was nothing new” (Dekel, Andipatin, & Abrahams, 2020, p.6). This in turn lead this participant, Adam, to violent behaviors against his spouse. Female perpetrator Cayleigh described, *“he [her father] did abuse her [her mother] a lot and maybe she was scared of him...it seems to me that my mother did like being abused. Because she would not do anything or take me and run away or go to her family”* (Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin, 2018, p.8).

Having feelings related to observing abuse as a child was not discussed and perpetrators did not explore the ways in which these occurrences may or may not have impacted them. Additionally, Cayleigh did not show empathy for her mother’s abuse though her father had also sexually and physically abused her as a child.

Moodley et al. (2019) was one of the few papers (n=3) that did not focus on biographical and predisposing factors, but instead examined perceptions of perpetrators’ treatment and rehabilitation post-crime. Perpetrators recounted the lack of freedom and independence within the psychiatric hospital: *“Nobody likes being locked up. It’s being cooped up in the ward all the time with anything to*

do...like you've been buried alive, you can't breathe sometimes, like there is no freedom" (Moodley et al., 2019, p.6).

Gender Differences

There were notable gender differences between female and male perpetrators. Female perpetrator's perceptions included a profound emphasis on struggles with the domains of motherhood, mental instability, and gender norms. Stanton et al. (2000) recorded anecdotes of six women who described their role as a mother within their narratives. One participant described feeling like a *"no-good mother"* and spoke about considering suicide to spare her surviving children (Stanton & Simpson, 2006, p. 107). Stanton et al. (2000) obtained additional insight into the impressions women had about being a the perfect mother. Women in this study spoke of the difficulties of motherhood and the varying expectations they had of themselves. One mother noted, *"I expected so much of myself...I was actually just doing so well and I couldn't see it."* (Stanton et al., 2000, p. 1454). Male perpetrators' perceptions of motherhood were also highlighted in Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin's (2018) paper. *Howard* spoke about his expectations and perspective of a mother's role in a child's life, *"It's very important to have a mother because every child needs a mother's love...a father can't give that love...your mother will understand you better than your father"* (Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin, 2018, p. 10).

Amongst the articles, mental instability was only discussed in relation to female perpetrators. Male perpetrators' accounts and reflection encompassed mostly biographical factors and history of violence (Dekel, Andipatin, Abrahams, 2020; Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin, 2018). There were four studies (Moodley et al., 2019; Razali et al., 2018; Stanton & Simpson, 2006; Stanton et al., 2000) that sampled from patients of psychiatrists, outpatient clinics, and psychiatric hospitals. Other studies, including Korbin (1987) had participants who reported psychiatric hospitalizations in the past, some

close to the time of the homicide. Women had perceived concerns of varying degrees for their children. Some women had extreme concerns; for instance, one woman who spoke of her abusive spouse and indicated that she couldn't leave her children with him *"so the only thing was to take mine and all my children's life"* (Moodley, 2018, p. 6).

Notably, female perpetrators displayed concern for their child's developmental progress. Half of studies extracted (Korbin, 1957; Stanton et al., 2000; Stanton & Simpson, 2006; Moodley et al., 2019) interviewed perpetrators that were on a spectrum of mental illness. Of all the studies, two reported difficulties of female perpetrators in confronting their own perspectives of their child's developmental delays (Korbin, 1957; Stanton et al., 2000). One perpetrator described disappointment during the child's wellness visit at the pediatrician's office:

When the doctor picked up the infant's hands, the child *"just flopped back, embarrassing me that he wouldn't even try"* (Korbin, 1987, p. 401). In the Stanton et al., (2000) study, one perpetrator recounted feeling *"quite certain that there was like something wrong with him...I thought because I was so um, stressed that the baby had been born with my stress"* (Stanton et al., 2000, p. 1454). Female perpetrators observed witnessing other children (e.g., nieces and nephews) reach developmental milestone which because *"proof"* of their child's abnormalities.

Female perpetrators in this cohort of mentally ill women, spoke of their struggles with psychosis and suicidality at great length (Moodley et al., 2019; Stanton et al., 2000). Among perpetrators who experienced psychosis, one reported feeling that *"everything was so good and wonderful"* and felt that they *"had it under control"* and was taken by surprise when they committed the crime (Stanton et al., 2000, p. 1455). Another perpetrator who was diagnosed with psychosis, reported, *"I hadn't thought of it earlier"* when asked if they had intentional thoughts of killing their child before the incident (Stanton et al., 2000, p. 1455). Other female perpetrators conveyed having voices influencing them to commit the murder:

“I was from a Prophet and then there was a voice and that told me that I must give my child methylated spirits to drink. I took the spirits and gave it to the child to drink and then I took the child to the hospital and when I reached the hospital they told me that the child is now dead and then from there I was arrested” (Moodley et al., 2019, p. 6).

Authors touched on structural factors affecting perpetrators in their day-to-day life prior to and after the crime. Razali et al., (2018) discussed how women were impacted by living in a patriarchal society and perpetrators’ accounts encapsulated that struggle. For instance, one author noted that a precursor to neonaticide is unwanted pregnancy in a society that sees that as immoral (Razali et al., 2018). Female perpetrators across most articles spoke of their experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual assault in their relationships. In Smithey (1997) perpetrators reported experiencing sexual assault by their fathers or relatives as well as acquaintances and strangers. One participant who was raped by her friend’s brother discussed receiving *“emotional punishment”* as a result of reporting the rape to her family:

“My friend’s brother raped me...I went home the next morning [after being assaulted]...and told my parents. My mom freaked, [the] police [got] involved. Things sort of changed, they were angry at me for what happened and I started feeling....like I had done something wrong” (Smithey, 1997, p.263)

Economic deprivation, specifically across female perpetrators, was a point of reflection for many researchers. Within Smithey’s theoretical domains, economic deprivation of resources was linked to violent behavior. Female perpetrators reported stress due to absence of the infant’s father and adverse living conditions, manifesting from a lack of economic resources. One male perpetrator spoke of the high expectations from the child’s grandmother:

“I started to get angry, because if I see his [stepson’s] face, I see his grandmother” which served as a reminder that he was unemployed. He mentioned that she *“rubbed it in my face that I don’t have money”* and made things *“extremely frustrating”* (Smithey, 1997, p.263). This provoking situation highlights how societal structures of men as breadwinners may play a part in how perpetrators perceive the crime they have committed.

Societal & Structural Barriers

Societal impediments were reflected in both male and female perpetrators' accounts. Discussions of community-level violence were apparent across some studies (n=3). Gang involvement, for example, was reported amongst the male perpetrator population of two studies (Dekel, Andipatin, Abrahams, 2020; Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin, 2018). Standards of behaviors in gang affiliation were addressed including extreme responses to any member stepping "out of line" (Dekel, Andipatin, & Abrahams, 2020, p.8). An example of stepping this sentiment, was seen in the perpetrator *James*, who contends that his stepson did not listen to him when he would ask him to perform tasks, which brought a great deal of embarrassment to *James* as he was not able to "control" the child (Dekel, Andipatin, & Abrahams, 2020). This in turn allowed him to view the act of killing the child as "a response to being provoked" (Dekel, Andipatin, & Abrahams, 2020 , p. 8).

Substance use also was a theme in the perpetrators' lives. Some perpetrators reported substances affecting their ability to be parent, while others spoke of their support networks being intrinsically involved in the illegal exchange of drugs.

For instance, in Smithey (1997), one woman discussed how the child's father "was deeply involved in drugs—he sold them but never used them. He would leave, he stayed lots of places but he was never home...he left all hours of the night. I know he was dealing [drugs]. His friends told me" (p.266)

Alcohol and substance misuse in some cases inevitably ended in tragic consequences, including but not limited to, the death of a child. An example of this was shown in the example of *Zubeidah* who stated that "if I was sober, my child would still be alive", assuaging their own responsibility and placing the blame on drugs and alcohol (Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin, 2018, p.11).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our team extracted a total of eight papers focusing on child homicide perpetrators perspectives. All (n=8) were published in English although in some of the countries represented, Malaysia and South Africa for example, English is not the primary language. This demonstrates a need for research and /or the publication of papers led by scholars from low- and middle-income countries. Terminology to describe perpetrators' crimes varied greatly and included: filicide, fatal child maltreatment, child murder, and infant homicide. Based on the results, we found that predisposing factors, including child abuse, and witnessing violence as a child, were a significant theme across perpetrators' accounts. Common themes across both male and female perpetrators were idealized motherhood, holding mothers to a higher standard in the caregiving role, and paying close attention to the mental well-being of female perpetrators.

Childhood upbringing was reflected in many of the perpetrator's accounts. Researchers concluded that witnessing abuse as a child had a direct impact on perpetrators life trajectories. Researchers cited attachment theory and social learning theory to explain how these experiences impacted perpetrators. Both theories place value on everyday interactions of a family and the vast implications these interactions have in predicting violence. Perpetrators placed the responsibility on predisposing factors, such as child abuse, which allowed them to present as victims; at times even blaming partners or family members explicitly. Deflecting blame to external factors, such as poverty, limited opportunities, and socio-cultural standards, is a critical yet not discussed element across papers.

There were major differences between the life accounts of male and female perpetrators and the way in which researchers perceived them. Gender differences between male and female perpetrators were evident regarding their histories of violence and experiences with psychosis. More

specifically, female perpetrators disproportionately reported experiences of IPV, assault, and episodes of psychosis. Male perpetrators were not pathologized in the way that female perpetrators were when it came to mental illness. Almost all papers included diagnosis of female perpetrators and how obstacles with mental health (e.g., depression or psychosis) played a part in the crime. An explanation of this could be due to mental health stigma amongst males; where men's mental health is often overlooked, and they are significantly less likely to seek help and engage in unhealthy behaviors across a variety of contexts (Chatmon, 2020). Few authors discussed the double standard of female perpetrators, who often receive harsher and more demonizing reactions from the public as well as health professionals; for instance, these reactions may refer to mothers as unfit or uncommitted to the caregiver role (Little and Tyson, 2017; Niblock, 2018). Motherhood was discussed in-large across papers where both female and male perpetrators made their high expectations of motherhood clear. Motherhood was idealized across papers, where opinions on how and what a mother's role should look like were deeply discussed. For female perpetrators, accounts of motherhood not only related to societal expectations and their upbringing, but also their lived experiences as mothers. They spoke of the pressure to be "super-mom" and the mental health implications in not meeting the demands of this role.

Overall, female perpetrators reported systemic and societal barriers that were directly linked to the crime. Razali et al. (2018) was the only author to explicitly discuss the way that patriarchal society and expectations, specifically relevant to these perpetrators' contexts, played a significant role in female perpetrators' lives. Perpetrators across studies referenced strict gender roles and expectations present in their environments before and after the crime. Though these were notable factors across papers, their implications were not discussed at length. Other factors, including poor school performance, low socio-economic status, and alcohol and substance use, were reported

amongst perpetrators. All but one theory focused on individual or interpersonal interactions of the perpetrators. The epigenetics framework, employed in Dekel, Abrahams, & Andipatin (2018) of integrating biological and environmental implications into violence research proves to be an important tool in understanding crime beyond the individual. Future research should strive to be more holistically integrate of both biological and psychosocial perspectives. The synthesis of epigenetic and attachment theories provides one promising path as it sheds new light on how intergenerational trauma and community violence play a role in these crimes. Furthermore, there are other important factors within our environment, including carceral systems globally, that contribute to the perspectives and lives of perpetrators. There is a greater need in understanding how institutional and organizational interactions play a part in these kinds of crimes. While Moodley's (2019) study focused on mentally ill perpetrators in inpatient and outpatient psychiatric hospital settings, it did not apply explanatory frameworks to understand how these institutions affect the perpetrators. Masculinity and gender and power, as well as feminist theories could also shed light on the ways in which society affects perpetrators.

This systematic review presents the imperative of integrating perpetrators perspectives is in the work of violence prevention. As instrumental as the psychological perspectives found in this review have been, there is a critical need for more robust work in and across disciplines. Perpetrators are the main drivers of this crime, making their rationalizations and motivations for the crime an incredibly important marker for the prevention of child murder.

PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Child murder continues to be a burgeoning public health problem across our society, though global research on child murder that include perpetrators narratives is limited. Without these essential perspectives, the work will continue to be incomplete, missing a critical aspect to a larger endeavor of prevention. Due to the absence of work within this specific margin, there is an opportunity for researchers and practitioners across disciplines to develop the fabric with this goal in mind. Interdisciplinary agendas should be set across disciplines that signal to the importance of collecting these accounts as well as to initiate research aimed at understanding these perspectives.

Despite our efforts to include Spanish and Portuguese in our search, all papers were published in English. Given that this review highlights research across four countries –New Zealand, South Africa, Malaysia, and the U.S. – there is a great need open-access publications that span several languages to reach practitioners globally. Creating networks of inter-disciplinary experts globally should be prioritized to understand gaps in theory and methodological approaches.

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