

How do filicide offenders differ from other murderers?

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People who commit filicide, the killing of their own child, are no more psychotically disordered than other homicide offenders. Research published in the open access journal *BMC Psychiatry* has shown that prevention of filicide cannot remain the task of psychiatry alone, but health care and society at large must work to prevent the danger.

Hanna Putkonen from Vanha Vaasa Hospital, Finland, worked with a team of Finnish researchers to compare the psychosocial history, index offence, and psychiatric morbidity of filicide offenders with other homicide offenders. She said, "The novel results of this nationwide study reinforce the general impression that filicide offenders are a distinct group of homicide offenders. However, they did not emerge as mentally disordered as has previously been supposed".

Filicide offenders were not as often intoxicated with alcohol during the crime and they had significantly less previous criminal offending than the homicidal controls. They were more likely to be employed and were not psychopaths. Half of the filicide offenders but none of the controls attempted suicide at the [crime scene](#). According to Putkonen, "It seems filicide as a phenomenon is closely associated with suicide; perhaps at times it is even more about the suicide than the killing".

The researchers conclude that, although psychopathy was not a risk factor for filicide, the filicide offenders did exhibit emotional problems which should be noted as risk factors and that their [suicidal behavior](#) signals distress. Putkonen said, "The filicide offenders might be people

who are incapable of handling everyday difficulties. Parents who are severely fatigued or otherwise not able to cope must receive adequate support".

More information: Differences between homicide and filicide offenders; results of a nationwide register-based case-control study, Hanna Putkonen, Ghitta Weizmann-Henelius, Nina Lindberg, Markku Eronen and Helina Hakkanen

BMC Psychiatry (in press), www.biomedcentral.com/bmcpsychiatry/

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