

Children of murdered women run higher risk of mental disorder

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Research from Karolinska Institutet shows that the offspring of women murdered by their partners run an elevated risk of mental disorder, substance abuse and criminal behaviour.

In the study, which is published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, the researchers studied [children](#) of the victims of intimate partner femicide (IPF). The study included 261 perpetrators and 494 children. The researchers found that mental disorder and a history of [violent crime](#) were more common amongst the perpetrators than the rest of the population, and that subsequent mental disorder, substance abuse, criminal behaviour and self-harm were common amongst the children.

For most women who are murdered in Sweden, the perpetrator is a current or former male partner, and children who are thus deprived of their mother can develop [mental health problems](#). In the present study, the researchers used national registries to identify all men who had killed a woman with whom they had offspring between 1973 and 2009, and to collect data on prior psychiatric morbidity, attempted suicide and violent criminal behaviour. The perpetrators were compared with controls randomly selected from the general population. The children were followed longitudinally over several years and also matched with population controls.

The team behind the study concludes that the risk factors for IPF include mental disorders and prior violent criminal behaviour, and that offspring older than 18 years at the time of their mother's murder run an elevated

risk of committing violent crime and of premature death, including suicide. Self-harming and violent [criminal behaviour](#) were also more common amongst these children.

"Children who lose their mother before the age of 18 have a worse prognosis than other children, in terms of [mental disorder](#), including [substance abuse](#)," says Henrik Landström Lysell, doctoral student at Karolinska Institutet's Department of Clinical Neuroscience. "The healthcare and social services should give priority to these children's psychosocial needs, regardless of age."

More information: "Killing the Mother of One's Child: Psychiatric Risk Factors Among Male Perpetrators and Offspring", Henrik Lysell, MD; Marie Dahlin, MD, PhD; Niklas Långström, MD, PhD; Paul Lichtenstein, PhD; and Bo Runeson, MD, PhD. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 5 January 2016.

Provided by Karolinska Institutet

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