

An Analytical Study of Domestic Homicide by Female in Japan

—The Inhibiting Factors of the Self-Actualization

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Abstract

Objective: An examination of the Japanese female crimes would contribute to understanding the recent rise of cruel events as filicide, spousal homicide etc. **Methods:** Eight forensic psychiatric test cases were examined in detail from the perspective of “self-actualization”. **Result:** The main results are as follows; (1) attempted suicides and attempted extended suicides were frequent in the cases that have the history of psychiatric disorders. (2) Depressive states just before the crime were often seen. (3) The replacement of the subject occurred especially often in the cases that killed their own children. And then the classification of domestic homicide was done based on the two axes of “the degree of replacement of the subject in self-actualization” and “the degree of the crisis in the self-actualization”. They are “Replace-collapse type”, “Involving type”, “Fettering-off type”, “Irrelevant type”. **Discussion:** The depressive states and substitute of self-actualization were found to be important concerning the pathology of crimes in Japanese female. The results may suggest that the tendency toward mother-child over-identification in Japan tends to prevent both mother and child from the personality maturation.

Key Words: domestic homicide, female, self-actualization, over-identification

In recent Japan, there have been a number of cruel crimes such as the subway sarin murders in Tokyo, the child abuse and the filicide and the child homicide by the child. The belief that Japan is “one of the safest countries in the world” is now being challenged. It is undoubtedly significant to examine the changes in the Japanese mentality at this point to clarify the background of these cases. In this study, the author will examine some forensic psychiatric test cases of domestic homicide committed by female to investigate the pathology in the Japanese gender and to consider changes in domestic stress patterns. Such an investigation will surely be helpful in clarifying the background of such murder cases.

Homicide by female

The number of women arrested for murder has been stable at around 400 cases per year between 1945 and 1990 in Japan^[1]. This figure is decreasing instead of the general increase in crimes. The number of women arrested for murder in 1999 is 214 cases^[2]. This decreasing tendency might reflect the decrease in neonaticides.

In a large-scale research project on female criminals in 1982^[3], the female murderers were characteristically young housewives (ages of 20's, and 30's), and poorly educated, while the majority of the victims were the women's own children (65%) and husbands (22%). In the study, they examined the factors such as the character, the life situation, the family conflict, the economic problems and the health problems. The researchers concluded that the background of female murderers had little relation to the changes of the social situations, and that there were little changes in the women's way of thinking. Is this true concerning the female at present?

In the United Kingdom, 37% of all women homicide victims were murdered by their current or former

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intimate partner compared to 6% of men victims^[4]. Weizmann-Henelius et al.^[5] reported that the violent behaviors by women lead more often to the death of the victim, when the victim is closely related to the perpetrator. Kellermann et al.^[6] reported that in contrast to men, who killed nonintimate acquaintances, strangers, or victims of undetermined relationship in 80% of cases, women killed their spouse, an intimate acquaintance, or a family member in 60% of cases. And they also reported that although women comprise more than half the U.S. population, they committed only 14.7% of the homicides. This tendency is common in almost all the country.

Thus, the number of the murder cases by female is much less than that by male. But most of the victims of the female perpetrators were their own children and husbands.

Maternal filicide

d'Orban (1984)^[7] reported that 89 women charged with the killing or attempted murder of their children were examined in a female remand prison. Six types of maternal filicide were distinguished: battering mothers (36 cases), mentally ill mothers (24 cases), neonaticides (11 cases), retaliating mothers (9 cases), women who killed unwanted children (8 cases) and mercy killing (1 case).

Farooque and Ernst (2003)^[8] found that mental illness is common among perpetrators, In addition, they found a high frequency of substance abuse among parents who killed their children. They also found a significant frequency of intellectual impairment in mothers. Lewis and Bunce (2003)^[9] said that women with psychosis were more likely than those without to have a history of substance abuse; to have past and ongoing psychiatric treatment; and to be older, unemployed, more educated, and divorced or separated. They were less likely to be first time mothers or to have had prior contact with Children's Protective Services. The psychotic mothers more often confessed, attempted suicide at the time of the filicide, killed multiple children,

Karakus et al.^[10] reported that the mean age of mothers who committed filicide was 26.5 ± 7.7 years. More than half of the parents were diagnosed with psychiatric disorders and came from disadvantageous as socioeconomic environments, where unemployment and illiteracy rates are highly above the average.

McKee et al.^[11] stated with the study filicide in British and Canadian mothers that the consistency of characteristics across countries suggested that women who killed their children were nonaddicted, married, low-income, mentally ill, new or recent mothers under 30 who, acting alone, killed only one of their children, likely of preschool age. Bourget et al.^[12] reported that 15 of 27 women committed suicide after the filicide. A psychiatric motive was determined for more than 85 percent of the mothers, and most of the mothers had received previous treatment for a depressive or psychotic disorder. Husain, et. al.^[13] concluded from their study that the filicidal mothers were different from abusive mothers and that the risk of fatality as a complication of child abuse increases significantly when the mental illness is present in the mother. They pointed to the implications of their findings for child protection and intervention procedures and suggested that one should act very vigorously and take the child into protective custody when the mother was found to have a major psychiatric illness. Stanton, Simpson, Wouldes et al.^[14] reported that the findings underline the difficulty of identification of risk and prevention of maternally ill filicide in the women who described being very caring towards their children, and little or no warning of filicidal urges. They may be better understood in terms of the illness than individual stress or psychodynamics.

Kunst et al.^[15] reported that with the study on "the psychodynamics of maternal filicide from an object relations perspective, among psychotic women, the murder of the child reflects a critical interplay among the mother's neurobiology, constitution, developmental experiences, and complex internal object world. Two types of personality structure are discussed. For the disorganized type, the psychodynamic scenario involves attempts

to contend with the danger of massive internal breakdown. For the organized type, the scenario involves attempts to contend with the danger of persecution and annihilation. For these women, physical violence is used because of failures in metallization, and is an enactment of catastrophic internal anxieties.”

Konishi et al. [16] proposed the classification of the mother-child relationship in filicide cases. They employed two axes of “the intensity of assuming mother role (weak/strong)” “fear of losing their child (existence/non-existence)”, and classified 3 types of relationships (A: Denial Type, B: Go together Type, C: Bring Back Type).

Spousal homicide by female

Wilson and Daly. [17] reported that in Canada, the 1886 women and men killed by spouses between 1974 and 1992 represent 15% of all Canadian homicide victims, 38% of adult female victims and 6% of adult male victims.

Kellermann et al. [3] reported that “the overall risk of homicide for women was substantially lower than that of men, their risk of being killed by a spouse or intimate acquaintance was higher. In contrast to men, the killing of a woman by a stranger was rare. When men killed with a gun, they most commonly shot a stranger or a non-family acquaintance..”

In this paper, the author intended to investigate the pathology in the Japanese mothers and wives, and examined the changes in the patterns of family stress. Here the author would use the concept of “self-actualization”. In that context, the crime represents the collapse of achieving self-actualization.

In brief, Maslow’s theory [18] categorizes human needs as a hierarchical pyramid with the 1st level representing the biological being, the 2nd level: the psychological being, the 3rd and 4th level: the social being, and the 5th level: the metaphysical being. Here the classification of domestic homicide will be tried by using “self-actualization”.

There are few studies in the domestic homicide which analytically examine the case data in detail with the view point of self-actualization of female.

METHODS

Subjects: Eight forensic psychiatric evaluation cases (four spousal homicide cases and four filicide cases) examined at the Mental Hygiene Department of the University of Tsukuba between 1990 and 1994.

Methods: The case studies and the data analyses were undergone in detail based on the concepts of “self-actualization”. Here the author hypothesized the formulation of domestic homicide from a perspective of self-actualization (Figure 1). And the psychiatric test data were classified according to the factors in the formulation and the concept of self-actualization. The categories used here were “the psychiatric characteristics”, “the psychological dynamics in family” and “Social adaptability and the pathology in self-actualization.”.

$$\text{HoD}(f) = P\{h, a, b, c\} E\{e1, e2, m1, m2\} I\{i1, i2\} G\{n1, n2, n3, n4, n5\}$$

HoD: domestic homicide

P: Personality, h: heredity, a, b, c: personality disorder cluster A,B,C

E: Environment, e1: social environment, e2: family dynamics,

m1: direct motives, m2: indirect motives,

I: Independence, i1: economic independence,

i2: psychological independence,

G: Gratification level of Basic Need, n1: Primary need

n2: need for safety

n3: need for belonging & being loved

n4: need for social esteem

n5: need for self-actualization

Figure 1. The formulation of the domestic homicide by female

RESULT

Data from these psychiatric test cases were analyzed based on three categories as “the psychiatric characteristics” (Table 1), “the psychological dynamics in family” (Table 2) and “Social adaptability and the pathology in self-actualization.” (Table 3).

1. The psychiatric characteristics

In this category, suicide attempts and extended suicide attempts were often found in both the spousal homicide cases and the filicide cases. In the spousal homicide cases, the offenders had irritable and aggressive personalities, but in the filicide cases the offenders did not have those tendencies (Table 1).

Table 1. The psychiatric characteristics of eight cases

Group	Case no.	Age	Crime	Past illness	Past crime	Diagnosis	heredity	Personality
spousal homicide cases	case 1	64	Homicide (partner)	(-)	(-)	Paranoid Dis. Depressive N.	(-)	industrious, serious bullish
	case 2	51	Incendiarism	Abortion	(-)	Depressive State	(-)	serious, nervous industrious
	case 3	48	Homicide Att.(partner)	BPD·Suicide Attempt.	Shoplifting	BPD Depressive State	(-)	exaggerated, nstable irritable
	case 4	26	Fatal Mayhem (partner)	Suicide Attempt.	Infanticide	Mild.D. Dysthymia Drug Dependence	(+) S	irritable ,impulsive immature
filicide cases	case 5	50	Homicide (daughter23y.)	Ext-.Sui.Att..	(-)	Dysthymia Ovary Tumor	(+) S	adjustable, sensitive intensive role-conscious
	case 6	36	Homicide (daughter11y.)	Suicide-. Abdo.Tumor	(-)	Bipolar	(-)	silent, naive serious
	case 7	49	Homicide (daughter18y.)	Depression .Post-Abortion	(-)	Reactive D. D.N.susp.	(+)	schizotypal, inactive immature, hysterical
	case 8	30	Homicide (daughter6m.)		(-)	D.post-dellivery Achohol Dependence	(+) susp.	honest, inferiority complex Not Sociable Cyclothimia

B.P.D.: borderline personality disorder, S: Schizophrenia, D: Depression.
N: Neurosis, Ext.Sui.Att.: Extended Suicide Attempt

2. The psychological dynamics in family

In the second category of the family dynamics, frequent conflicts and frustrations were found in the relation between the parents and the children, or between the partners in the spousal homicide cases. And the depressive states were frequently found just before the crime, especially with mothers who murdered their children (Table 2).

Table 2. The psychological dynamics in family

Group	Case no.	post family	parent-child relationship	couple relationship	mother-child relation	direct motives	indirect motives
spousal homicide cases	case 1	normal	flustration	parental image frustration	not intimate	fear Depressive State	poor communication disreliability
	case 2	conflict	negative feeling toward father	conflict love affair of husband.	normal	Depressive State Ext. Sui, Att.	neurotic state, latent agression love affair of husband.
	case 3	UK	UK	conflict agressive toward husband	UK	Persecution Mania fear of divorce	B P D, crisis of divorce ambivalence toward husband.
	case 4	normal	frustration with mother	conflict censured	UK	stimulating activity by husband	jealousy, ambivalence anger toward husband, irritability
filicide cases	case 5	conflict	ambivalence for father	normal	identified	Depressive state	marital problem love affair of daughter
	case 6	normal	normal	normal	intimate	morbid idea primitive fear exhausted Depressive state	harelip (daughter), conflict, hostility toward parents-in-law fear of cancer
	case 7	normal rich	normal	conflict for child education	conflict ambivalence	reactive depression expanded suicide	love affair of daughter mother-child conflict
	case 8	normal	not intimate	normal (over-identification)	depression		fear for raising desire for death

UK: unknown, BPD: borderline personality disorder

3. The adaptability and the pathology in self-actualization

The third category involved the ability to adjust to the society. In subcategory of economical independence, there were at most only 2 offenders in this category. One of them was a part time worker who regularly received a pension. The educational background and intelligence level were average to high. Regarding the basic needs gratification level, the degree of achievement varied but even those who were estimated as being at the 3rd or 4th level before problems arose were thought to have dropped to a lower level due to the depressive state itself and the extreme situation just before committing the crime. And the subject of self-actualization had shifted (from the women herself to her child) in mothers who murdered their own children (Table 3).

Table 3. Social adaptability and the pathology in self-actualization.

Group	Case no.	occupation social activity	economical independence	psychological independence	education intelligence	need level	substitute of self-actualization
spousal homicide cases	case 1	housewife part-time job	(+)	(+)	fairly educated normal	3 · 4th →2nd	(-) herself
	case 2	housewife staff of new religious party.	(+-)	(+-)	high school high	4th →2nd	(+-) herself, partner
	case 3	nurse member of new religious party.	(+-)	(-)	Nursing school	3rd →2nd	(+-) herself, partner
	case 4	housewife	(-)	(-)	junior high	2 · 3rd →2nd	(-) herself
filicide cases	case 5	housewife	(+-)	(-)	high school high	4th →2nd	(++) daughter (victim)
	case 6	housewife member of new religious party.	(+-)	(+)	high school or more	3rd →2nd	(+) daughter (victim)
	case 7	housewife	(-)	(-)	high school or more high	3rd →2nd	(++) daughter (victim)
	case 8	designer market researcher	(+)	(+-) isolation	high school or more. high	2 · 3 · 4th →2nd	(+) daughter (victim)

4. The classification regarding to the failure of self-actualization

Here the authors proposed a classification based on the failure of self-actualization using two axes of “the replacement of the subject of self-actualization (strong-weak)”, “the crisis of breaking down in self-actualization (strong-weak)” (Figure 2).

In the author’s classification, there are 4 categories as follows; A: Replacement-collapse type (strong/strong) (cases 2, 5, 6, 7, 8), B: Involving type (strong/weak) (case 3), C: Fettering-off type (weak/strong) (case 1), D: Irrelevant type (weak-weak) (case 4). In cases involving morbidly strong identification among the family members, the risk for committing domestic homicide increases when the situations that inhibit self-actualization would develop. They seem to easily involve other family members in their stressful situations.

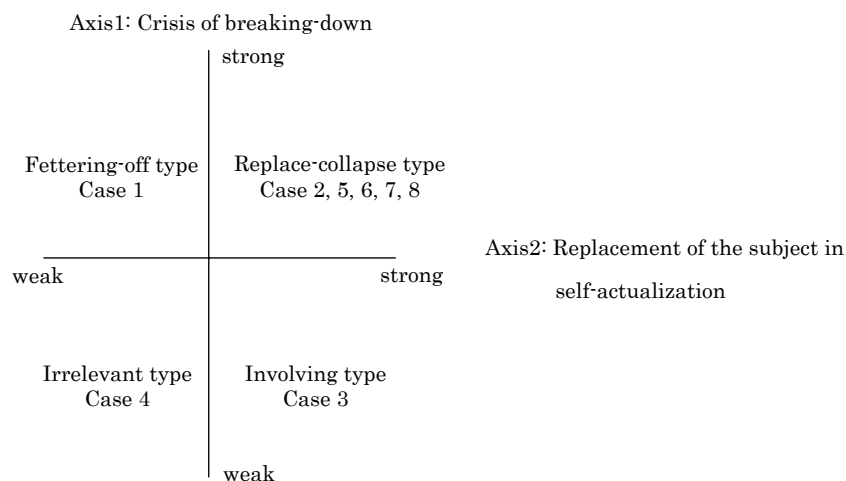


Figure 2. The classification of domestic homicide by female with a view of self-actualization

The results above could be summarized as follows: (1)Suicide attempts and extended suicide attempts were often found. (2)The depressive states frequently occurred just before the crime. (3)The murderers were economically dependent but had a rather high intelligence level. (4)Their gratification level had fallen to the 2nd level just before the crime. (5)The subject of self-actualization had often shifted to the child in mothers who murdered their child. (6)Though the category types of the spousal homicide cases were various, all of the filicide cases categorized to Replacement-collapse type.

DISCUSSION

1. The frequency of suicide attempts

It has been said that domestic homicides or extended suicides frequently involve people in depression ^[9] ^[11] ^[12] ^[13]. And the relation between depression and the domestic homicide/extended suicide has frequently been studied by various researchers. In a psychiatric study by Shibata et al. ^[19], who studied psychiatric test cases with bipolar disorders or depression, the authors tried to classify the crimes of depressive criminals and indicated that domestic homicide/extended suicide was the most frequent among the criminal characteristics of depression. This suggests that there is likely to be a depressive state in the background of domestic homicide or extended suicide. In the research on homicide and the responsibility of people in endogenous depression, Nakata ^[20] indicated that the rate of homicide is high in endogenous depression. In present study only two cases were diagnosed with endogenous depression. Frequent suicide attempts indicate that the offenders were often in a depressive state and that the depressive state tended to be a reactive depression. Regarding the psychological mechanism, it can be said that people in depressive states tend to feel self-deficiency, deny themselves or internalize their aggression to commit suicide, or involve family members as a result of over-identification. As Okumura ^[21] pointed out, it may be said that “the extended suicide arises as the last act in a family role based on love for the family members but regulated by delusion”.

2. Depressive states and the decrease in gratification frequently found.

Everly^[22] attempted a two-factor formulation of the pathogenesis of the post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). One factor was the concept of neurological hypersensitivity to arousal and the other was the concept of psychological hypersensitivity as intrusive recollective ideation. He indicated that “the arousal system can be charged, i.e., rendered hypersensitivity, through high intensity stimulation and/or chronically repetitive stimulation.” Then stimulations from the limbic system cause both afferent and inferent impulses that are maintained and reinforced by positive feedback. That results in numbing, withdrawal and depression, followed by PTSD, personality disorders, psycho-physiological disorders. He also said that people in the high need level drop back to lower levels of need for safety to obtain order, protection, and safety and try to reconstruct their new world. Then some individuals react to events with aggression, while others react with depression and hopelessness, and surrender to suicide attempt or extended suicide attempt. From the perspective of stress management, some cases in this study were considered of PTSD or psycho-physiological disorders. There were cases in chronically stressful marital situations (cases 1, 6) and cases facing acute or sub acute stressful family events (cases 2, 5, 7) in present series.

In addition to the traditional psychological analysis of these cases, an approach from the perspective of stress management would be helpful in understanding these crimes as well as the psychiatric disorders because this approach deals with both psychological and somatic aspects at the same time. In the near future, recent psycho-neuro-immunological results and phenomenological perspectives will be given more attention in this area.

3. The replacement of the subject in self-actualization and the classification of domestic homicide.

In cases of forensic psychiatric evaluation, the rate of Replace-collapse type is necessarily high. For example, Nakata ^[23] and Masuda ^[24] reported other cases of this Type. In Involving type, homicides seldom occur, but the risk for mental disturbance in children is rather high as a consequence of intensive interference. In homicides involving the partner, the degree of identification is rather low and the subjectivity of the partner is better established than that of children, so Replace-collapse type and Involving type seem to be rare among these cases. There was only one Fettering-off type found in present series, and this involved a woman over 60 years old. In a sense, she had a modern way of thinking, but at the same time she remained bound to traditional customs. Most contemporary women in similar situations would select divorce instead of homicide, but child victim in Fettering-off type cases will increase in the near future. Irrelevant type seems to be found in both normal people and people with immature personalities.

Instead of the classification proposed by Konishi et al. ^[16], the classification here is emphasized the pathology of female concerning the self-actualization.

Replacement of the subject in self-actualization easily involves other people to their own life and impairs their subjectivity. Especially in Japan, social disadvantages due to sexual discrimination have a strong effect on the social system and on the way of thinking, and restrict the range of activities among women. Therefore, women tend to find substitutions for self-actualization, and often find an ideal substitute in their children. Their strong psychological connection with their children plays an important role. And then the collapse of the substitute self-actualization may cause helplessness and hostility against not only themselves but the substituted persons.

4. The rather high intelligence level

Incompatible with the results in earlier studies, the subjects in this study showed a rather high intelligence level. This suggests that contemporary domestic homicide is not limited to the background of the poor education and the violent tendency. Rather a certain level of intelligence is needed for morbid identification to be formed in a complicated manner.

5. Economic dependency

This is also related to the social disadvantages. Economic independence plays a large role in the social psychological independence of women, because it inevitably enhances future perspectives and could play a preventive role against psychopathic identification. In that sense it is a very important factor in crime prevention. Improvement in the working conditions and legislation concerning women is needed.

CONCLUSION

It can be said that there is a tendency in Japanese mothers to involve their family members in their own world using the psychological defense mechanism of identification, where the victims of morbid identification do not lead their own lives but his/her mother's or wife's life. The victims are sometimes spoiled and reinforced to create the figure imaged by their mother or wife. This creates many full-grown spoiled children with the important social positions.

They have very high intelligence and considerable knowledge but little recognition of themselves as an individual. In that situation, they willingly hand their right of decision-making over their substitutes, and at the same time the boundary between their inner world and outer world becomes ambiguous because of their substitutes' invasive interference. They are continuously forced to improve their position in the society and to

obtain more. Furthermore, Japanese mothers have extreme perseverance with their situation; they easily let themselves become victims of her family members because they are considered as second sex by society and by themselves.

This means that social victimization may contribute to producing criminal behavior and immature adults in Japanese society. The problem lies in their mutual co-dependency. And the marital situation in Japan includes many problems involving severe stress in family life. Many subjects in this study developed a depressive state just before the event. It suggests that the crimes could have been prevented if the subject had tried to reduce the stressful situation and consulted a psychiatrist at an early stage. Medication is very effective for depressive symptoms except for difficult cases.

So-called pre-morbid characteristics of depression such as seriousness, industry, strong responsibility and so forth are often found in middle aged Japanese people, while there is also a new tendency rising as seen in the case 1, 3, 4. Some of the wives will no longer endure their situation. Some successfully obtain independence, some become kitchen drinkers and some become over-aggressive and impulsive, while others show little change. And the lack of boundaries in various areas makes the situation more complex. For example, the boundaries between male and female, professionals and amateurs, criminals and religionists are being weakened. Where the frameworks of social groups are loosened, people become narcissistic wanderers. We should learn the art of controlling and using this chaotic freedom.

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日本女性による家族殺人の分析的研究

—自己実現を阻む要因

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要約 :

目的 : 近年増加をみせる児童虐待及び殺人、夫婦間殺人など残虐な事件の生起を理解するために、日本における女性犯罪を検討する。方法 : 司法精神鑑定に付された8事例について、鑑定記録、面接などから得られた情報を詳細に検討・分析し、「精神医学的特徴」、「家族内心理力動」、「社会適応と自己実現の病理」の3つの観点から整理した。結果 : 概要は以下の通り。(1)自殺企図及び拡大自殺企図が精神障害既往歴のある事例に頻回にみられた。(2)抑うつ状態や欲求充足段階の2次欲求への低下が犯罪の直前にしばしばみられた。(3)自己実現における主体の置換が、特に子殺しの事例に頻回に生起していた等。また、以下のⅡ軸から女性の家族殺人の分類をした(Ⅰ軸:自己実現の主体の置換、Ⅱ軸:自己実現失敗の危機)。4つの型は、置換・崩壊型、巻き込み型、足枷排除型、無関係型であった。考察:日本の女性犯罪の病理を考える上では、犯行直前の抑うつ状態と主体の置換が重要であることが示唆された。また、日本における母親の過剰同一視傾向が、母子ともに人格的成熟を阻害し、家族病理、社会病理の一因となっていることが示唆された。

キーワード : 家族殺人、女性、自己実現、過剰同一視