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Matricide: the schizophrenic crime?

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to further examine the view that matricide is 'the schizophrenic crime' (Gilles, 1965). This report represents a comprehensive, retrospective and national study of all individuals in Scotland who, between 1957 and 1987 inclusive, were charged with the murder or the culpable homicide of their biological mother. Files of High Court indictments were examined for the relevant years to identify offenders prior to disposal, and individuals were followed up with respect to diagnosis and disposal. Twenty-six (twenty-three men and three women) were convicted of the murder or culpable homicide of their biological mother. Only 50 per cent (thirteen subjects) were known to the State Hospital, Carstairs. Six (24 per cent) subjects suffered from schizophrenia, seven (24 per cent) were given no diagnosis, five (20 per cent) suffered from personality disorder, four (16 per cent) from the alcohol dependence syndrome, three (12 per cent) from depressive illness, and one (4 per cent) from hypomania. Thus, whilst schizophrenia is over-represented in this subgroup of offenders, matricide should not be viewed as the schizophrenic crime. Given the prevalence of mental disorder in this group, pre-trial assessment by a Forensic Psychiatrist should be mandatory.