

CASE STUDY

## DESPERATION IN MAJOR SERIOUS DEPRESSIVE DISORDERS AND EXTENDED SUICIDE RISK: A CASE OF DOUBLE FILICIDE

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### Abstract

**The lack of hope or negative expectations about the future are possibly the most important and best predictive factors of suicide risk in depressive disorders with suicidal intent. This article describes a case of frustrated extended suicide, in which the murder of two minors occurs without the aggressor managing to take her own life, due to being rescued by a relative. The concepts of depressive hopelessness related to suicidal behavior are reviewed, as well as the different forms of extended suicide perpetrated within the family circle (filicide). *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 22 (S1): October-November 2021: 1-5.***

**Keywords: Despair, Major Depressive Disorder, Filicide, Murder, Extended Suicide, Frustrated Extended Suicide, Double Crime**

### Introduction

Lack of hope, or negative expectations about the future are possibly the most important prognostic factors and the best predictors of suicide risk in depressive disorders with suicidal thoughts or intentions [1,2].

Derived from the above, psychological phenomena such as lack of hope, shame, a feeling of worthlessness and low self-esteem are also key concepts in understanding suicide [3].

An investigation showed that patients suffering from depressive disorders and contemplating death or suicidal intentions, had lower self-confidence, excessive dependence on others and an elevated level of self-punishment compared to depressed patients without thoughts of death or suicide [4].

For Joiner, Brown, and Wingate [5] lack of hope is a fundamental psychological correlate of suicide. A study on the lack of hope has shown a stronger correlation between it, suicidal thoughts and suicide than between the lack of hope and depression, and depression and suicide.

Shneidman identified five groups of psychological pain predisposing to suicide (extended) and focusing on frustrated love; acceptance and belonging, loss of control, aggression of self-image and avoidance of shame; the loss of key relationships; excessive anger; and outrage and hostility [14].

The word "filicide" comes from the Latin *filuis*, son, and *caedere*, to kill, and refers to the death of one's own child by the father or mother. When one of the parents kills their newborn baby, they commit a homicide that is labelled infanticide. In general, filicide is reserved for children aged between 1 and 18 years, being subdivided into early type for ages of 1 to 12 years, and late type for those of more than 13 years [6].

For Cárdenas, and following studies by Mugavin and Cárdenas and Jimenez based on Resnik, the motivation of the aggressor allows the filicide to be classified according to the determinants or causes for the commission of it, as follows [7,11,12]:

1. Altruistic filicide: This typology is divided into two subgroups.

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- a. Altruistic filicide associated with suicide: Parents argue that they are protecting their children by committing the murder.
  - b. Altruistic filicide to alleviate suffering: In combination with the above, since the aggressor considers that they are also protecting their child from the harmful influence of hallucinatory thoughts or fantasies, and they carry out the criminological act in order to avoid the suffering of the child [7,8].
2. Acute psychotic filicide: Filicides that present psychic dysfunction of a psychotic-hallucinatory type and that perpetrate the crime due to the harmful influence of the mental disorder [7].
  3. Filicide for unwanted children: It occurs in children who are unwanted or unloved by one or both parents. The motivation of a parent to kill their child is generally related to issues of paternity, financial burden and potential impediment in having a career or achieving a goal, perceiving their child as an obstacle [8].
  4. Accidental filicide: The intention of the father is not to end the life of the minor. Most of these cases have been preceded by episodes of domestic violence in the home, culminating in the fatal outcome of an extreme “outburst of violence”. Accidental homicides caused by the “shaken child syndrome” can also be included in this group, since sudden movements of the head can lead to injuries and even death of the child [6].
  5. Filicide as revenge: Cases exist in which one of the parents kills their children to cause suffering to the other. It is compatible with the concept of the Medea Complex, already described in classical mythology; in this situation, the mother (Medea) expresses great desires to murder her child as a way of taking revenge against the father, by perceiving her child as a rival.

**The Case**

Following the above mentioned classification, the case is compatible with an altruistic filicide to alleviate the suffering associated with suicide. The case deals with a 35-year-old woman, a native of Bolivia, separated and mother of two children

who, at the time of death, the elder was 11 years old, and the younger, [9].

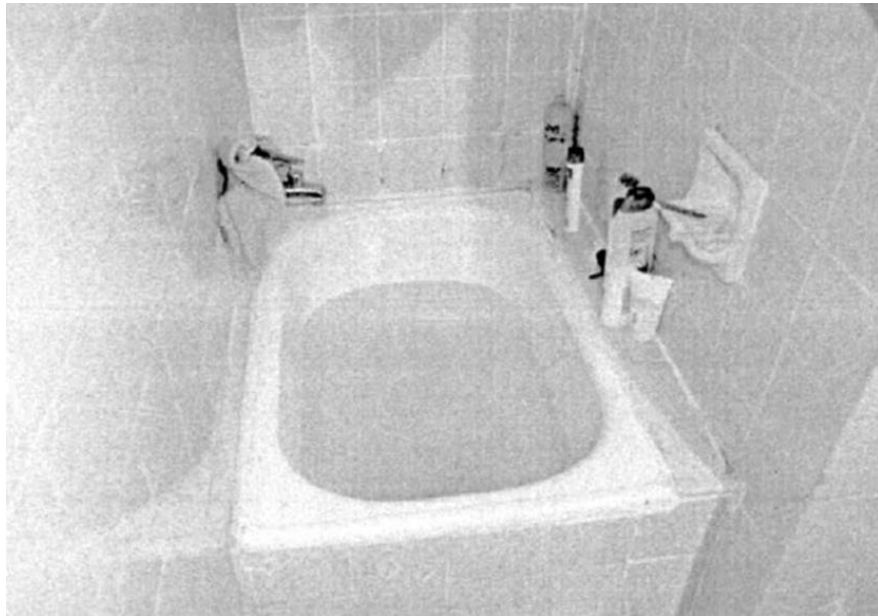
In order to avoid the suffering that life could bring them, the mother proceeded to sedate them with anxiolytics and then drowned them in the bathtub. According to her, later she proceeded to ingest anxiolytics herself, in order to commit suicide, but she decided to phone her husband, who had sufficient time to return home and rescue her from her state of autolytic intoxication (frustrated extended suicide).

The subject had experienced multiple circumstances and psychosocial episodes of an adverse nature, such as the death of her mother when the subject was 14 years old as a result of a tumour; an imminent eviction process on the dates close to the events in question [10,11]; episodes of domestic violence by her partner while living together; economic precariousness given their inability to reincorporate into the labour market, eventually needing the help of social and religious services; inability to return to the country of origin due to her lack of resources and given the need for medical-surgical treatment for her eldest daughter [12,13]; fear of losing custody of her children given the situation of high psychosocial conflict and the inability to achieve job and economic stability.

Due to the exposed context, the subject presented an emotional state in the form of a major depressive disorder of severe intensity, based on some basic personality traits of a dependent type that reached the degree of personality disorder. The clinical entities mentioned pivot on intense and serious feelings of psycho-emotional hopelessness that reach sufficient intensity to provoke criminological behaviour of such gravity as a double filicide.

The emotional intensity was such that when the forensic psychological evaluation of her mental state was held, the subject showed the letters that she wrote to her own children and that, as she stated, “*they were waiting for her wherever they are*” [14].

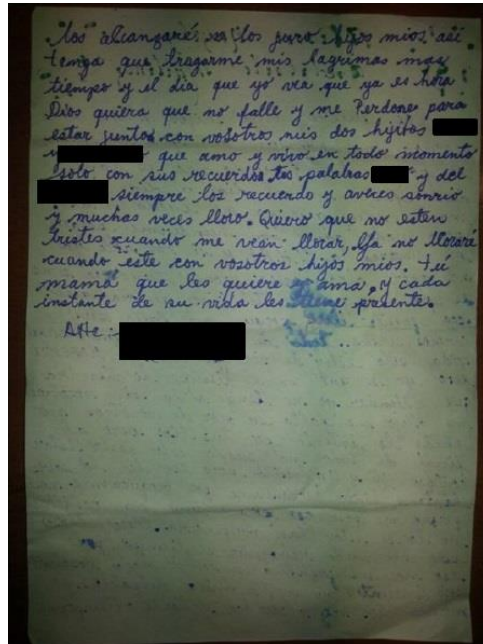
The verdict of the sentence was the conviction of the aggressor, as the author criminally responsible for two crimes of murder, in conjunction with the aggravating circumstance of kinship, and the analogous extenuating circumstances of confession and psychic alteration, to the penalty of ten years in prison for each of the victims [15].



**Figure 1: Photo detailing the bath where she drowned her two children**



**Figure 2: Photo detailing the scene of the crime, after proceeding to drown the minors**



**Figure 3: Photo detailing one of the letters that the homicidal mother wrote to her children [5]. The ink of the letter can be observed to have been diluted by the spilling of the mother's tears caused by her depressed and afflicted psycho-emotional state.**

### Discussion

It stands out what [16] considered with respect to a lack of hope being a fundamental psychological correlate of suicide.

In this sense, research studies and psychological evaluation techniques have practically zero results in terms of the predictive capacity of aggressive behaviour within the scope of an extended suicide. However, and although they may exist, it is known in the field of Forensic Psychopathology that the murderer that desires the death of their own fellow human beings (extended suicide) usually shows an apparent improvement in their mood to consummate the criminal act. For this reason, suicidal acts involving criminal behaviour towards family members tend to be totally unpredictable and surprising. On the part of the perpetrator, it involves a cognitive process of prior meditation and technical preparation for suicide. In the case of the victims, and especially in minor victims, naivety or innocence due to their young age makes them more vulnerable and fragile for the pursuit of fatalistic and tragic ends.

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