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article

The killing and thereafter: intimate partner homicides in a process perspective, part II

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This article puts intimate partner homicide (IPH) into a process perspective, and describes the latter two stages of the IPH process, that is, 'changing the project' and 'the aftermath'. The focus of analysis is on the moment when the perpetrator chooses to kill the victim, and what s/he does and says in the wake of the killing. Fifty court files, from cases involving 40 male and 10 female perpetrators, underwent thematic analysis. Regarding the final trigger pertaining to changing the project, some situational factors that trigger male-perpetrated IPH seem to differ from the corresponding factors in female-perpetrated IPH. Feelings of rejection and jealousy seemed to be more common as triggers to kill for men than for women, while some cases of female-perpetrated IPH were linked to self-defence in response to IPV. Moreover, as noted previously, no female perpetrators displayed possessiveness.

Regarding the aftermath, after the homicide the perpetrators generally contacted someone and admitted to having killed their partners. Only a few perpetrators denied culpability and even fewer, mainly male, perpetrators concealed their crimes and denied knowledge of them. However, even in cases where the perpetrator admitted to having killed their victims, their courtroom narratives were apparently constructed to minimise resposibility.

Key words intimate partner homicide • femicide • intimate partner violence • thematic analysis • process perspective

Key Messages

- The IPH process can be described as threefold, consisting of the following stages: the build-up before the killing, changing the project into killing one's partner and the aftermath to the killing. Similar triggers exist in the first two stages, and the boundaries between them are blurred, but a final trigger seems to precede the killing.

- IPH perpetrators may contact someone after the killing and admit to having committed it, but still attempt to minimise their responsibility.
- The IPH process is gendered, with different features in the respective cases of male and female perpetrators. It is often, but not always, preceded by male-to-female intimate partner violence (IPV).

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Introduction

Intimate partner homicide (IPH) can be analysed as a process that builds up over time. At one point in this process, the killer decides to kill. The previously described build-up phase (Enander et al, 2021) reaches a turning point and the process becomes lethal. What seems to be the final trigger to kill in this process? After the killing, the perpetrator may choose various courses of action: concealing or publicising the crime, admitting or rejecting culpability, attempting or committing suicide. What happens in the aftermath, when the deadly deed is done?

The aim of the study underlying this and a previous article (Enander et al, 2021) is to explore and describe IPH as a process. Our analysis departs from Dobash and Dobash's (2015) concept of a 'changed project' that triggers the killing. The research questions guiding our analysis were: What does the 'build-up' to the killing consist of?; When does the project change, that is, at what point does the perpetrator decide to kill?; and, finally, What does the aftermath of the deadly violence look like, in terms of what the perpetrator does and says at the scene, following the killing and in the courtroom? This article addresses the two latter questions and rests on a thematic analysis of district court records.

Literature review

The global IPH rate is estimated at one out of seven homicides, and more than a third of homicides with female victims are committed by a current or former intimate partner (Stöckl et al, 2013). Women are at six-fold higher risk of being killed by their partners than men (Stöckl et al, 2013). IPH is thus characterised by profound gender asymmetry. However, female perpetrators of lethal violence more often kill partners or ex-partners (56%), compared to acquaintances (26%), whereas men more often kill acquaintances (51%), compared to partners or ex-partners (19%) (Yourstone et al, 2008).

Most research regarding IPH focuses on risk factors among male perpetrators. Previous violence and possessiveness towards the female victim and perpetrators' feelings of jealousy and having been abandoned are well-known risk factors, especially in connection with termination of the relationship (Aldridge and Brown, 2003; Campbell et al, 2003; 2007; Dobash and Dobash, 2011; Dawson and Piscitelli, 2021; Kivisto, 2015), and/or 'agitation' as defined by Leth (2009).

According to the pertinent research, almost all male-to-female IPHs are committed during the first year after a separation and 50 per cent occur within the first two months. Physical violence and stalking often precede the homicide (Aldridge and Brown, 2003; Kivisto, 2015) and perpetrators often have previous convictions for violent crimes. Other pertinent risk factors are unemployment in male perpetrators (Aldridge and Brown, 2003; Campbell et al, 2003) and the existence of guns in the household (Spencer and Stith, 2018). Despite a generally high level of alcohol and drug addiction among male perpetrators, most are not under the influence of drugs or alcohol when committing IPH, in contrast to perpetrators of other types of violence (Kivisto, 2015).

Women generally kill in self-defence or in retaliation for violence, as found by an extensive body of research (Swatt and He, 2006; Campbell et al, 2007; Caman et al, 2016). Thus, previous victimisation is a major risk factor for female perpetration. Unemployment, and having no children with the IPH victim are other risk factors, as is alcohol/drug abuse (Caman et al, 2016; Vatnar et al, 2018). Quarrelling when drinking is a commonly reported motive when women kill (Weizmann-Henelius et al, 2012; Caman et al, 2016; Vatnar et al, 2018), with or without previous IPV. However, previous IPV is arguably essential in how the nature of the 'quarrel' should be understood, that is, as violent resistance (Johnson, 2008) or not.

The scene of the crime is often the victim's home or in the vicinity, and strangulation is more often the modus operandi in IPH than in the killing of strangers (Dobash et al, 2004; Leth, 2009). Strangulation or stabbing with a knife or other sharp object is reported to be the most common modus operandi, although blunt force is also used. This is reflected in a retrospective investigation of homicides in southern Denmark (Leth, 2009), that found that the victims were strangled in almost one-third (n=30) of all male-to-female IPH cases and that a knife was the most common weapon in all IPH. However, there are some gendered differences; while both female and male perpetrators use sharp force, very few female perpetrators strangle their victims (Dobash et al, 2004; Leth, 2009).

When the deadly deed is done, male perpetrators often deny responsibility or even involvement in the crime, and previous research has highlighted that their narratives often blame the victim (Dobash and Dobash, 2011; 2015; Dilmon and Timor, 2014). Dobash and Dobash (2011) describe how 52 of 104 perpetrators charged with (and later convicted of) murdering their partners denied responsibility, and some perpetrators continued their denial after conviction. After serving time in prison, almost half of these perpetrators (49%) expressed no empathy toward their victims and 36 per cent had no feelings of remorse. In Dilmon and Timor's (2014) detailed analysis of the narratives of 12 men who had killed their female partners, they found that these perpetrators described themselves as good and caring men, depicting their dead spouses as evil and deceitful, as well as bad mothers. The perpetrators also stated that they had been provoked by the victims. Some described the killing as self-defence while others stated that it had been a mistake and/or a fatal accident.

Aim

In a previous article, we described the build-up to the IPH as the first stage of a threefold process. The aim of this article is to explore and describe the following two

stages of this process, that is, 'changing the project' and 'the aftermath'. We thus focus on the moment when the perpetrator chooses to kill the victim, and what he – or occasionally she – does and says in the wake of the killing: at the scene, following the killing and in the courtroom.

Methodology

The ongoing IPH-STOP study aims at identifying and analysing all IPH cases perpetrated in the Västra Götaland Region[1] in western Sweden during 2000–2016. The major aim of the project is to identify risk factors for IPH, which might possibly contribute to prevention. Via police records, 59 IPH cases were identified. A few cases, not included in the study, were ambiguous and may in fact have been IPH. We are nonetheless confident that, by thoroughly going through all relevant police data on suspicious deaths, we did identify all cases that police investigations showed to be clear instances of IPH. In eight of these cases the perpetrators, all male, committed suicide before the case could be taken to court. We obtained district court records for the remaining cases, including 51 victims and 50 perpetrators, since one man killed two female ex-partners. Of these 50 IPH perpetrators, 40 were men and ten were women. It is noteworthy that another male perpetrator had also killed two female victims, but one was not included in the study since this IPH was committed before the year 2000. There was one male same-sex couple among the cases. Thirty-nine perpetrators were convicted of murder, four of manslaughter and four of involuntary manslaughter. In three cases, the alleged perpetrator was acquitted by the district court. In one of these, the female perpetrator was found to have killed her male partner but was acquitted on grounds of self-defence. In the other two cases, the male perpetrators were later convicted in a higher court of murder and manslaughter, respectively.

We let the research questions lead us into a thematic analysis of the district court records. Swedish court records document the court proceedings and contain detailed descriptions of events preceding, during and following the IPH, motivational factors as described by the perpetrators and any witnesses, as well as verdicts and sentences. However, using court records as a source of information in IPH cases has some obvious limitations, the foremost being that the victim is dead and her/his voice can no longer be represented. Thus there is a risk that the analysis colludes with the perpetrators' worldview, which may in turn generate victim-blaming (see Dobash and Dobash, 2011; 2015). We therefore want to emphasise that although the perpetrators' descriptions of the events – as depicted in the court records – are a central part of the material presented in this article, this does not mean that they should be unquestioned. A critical eye is important both when writing and reading about these accounts. Furthermore, it is important to remember that an analysis of court records only reflects what the court has found of interest to register in order to establish guilt.

Thematic analysis is a flexible method allowing for the use both of pre-established themes and of themes created while working with the material. A quote or text extract may cover and exemplify several themes in the material, rather than having to be forced into a single theme. Furthermore, themes are allowed to, and often do, overlap (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For a more detailed description of the steps in the analysis undertaken by the first and last authors, we refer to our previous article (Enander et al, 2021).

Theoretical framework

Our point of departure is a feminist understanding of IPH, connecting it to violence against women and bearing in mind that men's violence against women is an important precursor to IPH. This also applies when men are killed, since women often kill in self-defence or in retaliation for previous violence. Thus, when women kill in the context of and/or in direct response to IPV, we view this as a form of violent resistance (Johnson, 2008). However, we also acknowledge that perspectives derived from psychiatry and criminology are valid when examining IPH cases. We thus find it valuable to try to connect strands of research often regarded as conflicting.

In our previous article, we analysed the build-up to an IPH, with an emphasis on gender. This is an important backdrop to the analysis presented later in this article, since findings regarding differently gendered triggers also apply to the final trigger before killing and thus to the changing of the project. We found that the first, build-up, phase of an IPH is complex and encompasses several different features. Some of these, such as possessiveness, were clearly gendered and thus differed between male and female perpetrators; no female perpetrator displayed possessiveness. Our findings point to an escalation during the build-up. An escalation of violence over time was part of the build-up to the IPH for some male perpetrators, while female perpetrators exhibited a more rapid and situational escalation and/or violent resistance. Male perpetrators also seemed to have planned more. Escalating fears for the future were part of the build-up for both female and male perpetrators, often connected to a real or imagined threat of separation, but deteriorating mental health and suicide plans were only found in the accounts of male perpetrators. For male and occasionally female perpetrators, an escalation of alcohol/drug abuse could also be part of the build-up. Concurrent with previous research, we found that women often kill in the context of their own victimisation. However, only five of ten female-perpetrated cases emerged as clear cases of violent resistance; other situations and motives thus also appeared to be pertinent. In our analysis of the aftermath, we have placed greater emphasis on time and place than on gender, and it is thus essential to emphasise that IPH is characterised by gender asymmetry. Since 40 of 50 perpetrators in our material were male, the word 'perpetrator' generally indicates a male perpetrator in this article, unless 'female perpetrator' is specified.

The results concerning the last two stages of the IPH process, as it emerges in our analysis, are presented next.

Changing the project

As described earlier, the first stage of the IPH process, that is, the build-up before the killing, entails an escalation. At some point, however, the perpetrator decides to kill, and this is what we imply with the term 'changing the project'. This decision can, as portrayed in the court records, be deliberate and planned or occur 'out of the blue'. In other words, the changing of the project was more evident in some cases than in others. Most perpetrators stabbed their victims and/or used blunt force. Male perpetrators also shot or strangled their victims. Female perpetrators killed their victims by stabbing or with a blunt object, with the exception of one woman who poisoned her partner with what he thought was an alcoholic drink. Some male

perpetrators planned the killing by bringing a knife or firearm when approaching the victim, while others used available objects. In one case, children were injured when their mother was killed. In the majority of cases, the perpetrator stated that an argument had proceeded the killing. The victims' description of these 'arguments' is, obviously, lacking in the court records, which warrants a cautious interpretation. As described earlier, our previous analysis indicates that 'the argument' may have followed an escalation of many things, including violent behaviour.

The final triggers that, in our analysis of the court records, coincide with changing the project into killing are described next.

Feeling rejected

Some of the court records indicated that the perpetrator was triggered to kill by the female victim having met another man while still in a relationship with him. In other cases, the perpetrators described 'infidelity' that was most likely imaginary, that is, an assumption based on possessiveness, but nonetheless real for the perpetrator. If the relationship had ended, some perpetrators had still not been able to accept that the woman had a new relationship, probably perceiving this as being rejected in favour of the new partner. In one of these cases, the woman's new partner was also killed.

In one case, the perpetrator seemed to have been triggered to kill by feeling rejected when his wife refused to consent to what he called closeness:

> [The victim] and [the perpetrator] went to bed, but since [the perpetrator] wanted closeness, [the victim] moved away from him and his feeling of being abandoned grew even stronger. For some reason, he can't really explain why, he got out of bed, left the bedroom and went into the kitchen. In the kitchen, he got out a cast-iron frying pan and a sharpened knife.

Again, it is unclear how the victim would have described the perpetrator's 'desire for closeness'.

We have previously found possessiveness, with jealousy as one component, to be a main feature of the build-up in several male-to-female cases. It may be that when a perceived rejection 'adds insult to injury' in the mind of a possessive man, the project changes from trying to control the woman to getting rid of her.

Feeling provoked

In some cases, the perpetrator feeling provoked by the victim emerged as the main trigger to committing the deed. In the perpetrators' descriptions of events, the victims had provoked them by arguing or screaming:

> He was incredibly furious, but he doesn't know why. She was in his face and shouted at him to kill her and he swung at her twice with his fists.

What the perpetrators referred to as 'arguing' was generally part of the build-up in these cases and sometimes included an escalation of violence, from verbal to physical, in situations that were described as turbulent and intense. A perpetrator who had

been previously violent to the victim, and was currently facing a separation, described the final trigger as her hitting him:

> After they entered the flat again things were calm for a while but then [the victim] got furious again. He called her cheap. She spat at him, hit him with a stick and shouted. They fought for perhaps 30 minutes. He lost it and everything went dark.

As in this quote, perpetrators repeatedly described 'losing it' and that everything had gone dark when they had felt provoked. Male perpetrators described 'losing it' in the heat of an argument, while female perpetrators described how they 'lost it' after being harassed for hours by being told that they were unfit mothers, whores, fat, ugly or worthless.

In this theme, rage and hatred towards the victim protrudes as the core feeling and the motive to kill. Provocation is, of course, a problematic concept, since it places part of the blame on the alleged 'provoker'. Moreover, this is most commonly a woman, and the idea of women 'provoking' men into being violent is a common sexist stereotype. However, it may be that it is exactly because of these connotations that perpetrators describe the final trigger in terms of having been provoked. Shifting part of the blame onto the victim may possibly serve as a means to divert attention from the fact that perpetrators who felt provoked apparently wanted to silence their partners forever.

Hallucinating

Deteriorating mental health was a major part of the build-up phase in some cases, all of which were male-to-female. In some of these cases, imperative hallucinations as well as perceived external forces can be described as triggers for the killing:

> He killed his common-law wife because voices told him to do so. There was an external force that was controlling his thoughts and actions.

Male perpetrators also killed as a reaction to a perceived threat. In one case, the perpetrator was convinced that 'someone' was after him and in another case, the perpetrator felt threatened by menacing voices. In both these cases, the perpetrators seem to have confused the individuals perceived as dangerous with the victims, with lethal outcome. Although there were only a few of these cases, it is interesting to note that only male perpetrators described hallucinations and 'external forces' as triggers for IPH. More research is needed to understand why, but a cautious interpretation is that the combination and convergence of different risk factors – for instance being male, being abusive and having poor mental health – may yield this kind of final trigger.

Being at the end of the road

Some perpetrators described feeling that they had reached a place in their relationship where killing their partners was the only remaining option:

> He started to understand that everything was going to go to hell and he couldn't see a way out.

In these cases, the perpetrators commonly described a disagreement prior to the killing that made them conclude that something had to happen to end the relationship or prevent the victim from leaving it. They talked about killing their partners as 'inevitable'. One female perpetrator described the killing as the only way to end an abusive relationship. Male perpetrators described feeling that suicide was the only option in a situation which they felt they could no longer handle. However, ultimately the perpetrator did not commit suicide and the person who ended up dead was the partner. It is difficult to discern to what extent this outcome was premeditated. In some cases, it may have been a sudden impulse. However, in others it was not. One example is the case in which the perpetrator stated that he had planned to commit suicide in front of his former partner but had accidently shot her instead. A suicide letter written to their adult children, however, indicated that he had planned to shoot his wife first and then himself. This is similar to findings by Monckton Smith (2019), who found planning to be a component in both IPH and intimate partner homicide–suicide.

Acting in self-defence

Finally, some perpetrators claimed that they had acted in self-defence. These narratives differ along the lines of gender. Although only one female perpetrator was acquitted on the grounds of self-defence, other female perpetrators also described feeling seriously frightened of the male victim and killing him in response to being threatened and abused:

> [The victim] said, 'I'm going to kill you, you bastard, bloody bitch.' He tried to smash her face with his knee while he had hold of her hair. That terrified her. She rooted around for something to make him let go. She got hold of the little screwdriver and rammed it into [the victim's] neck.

Of interest here is that five of the ten female perpetrators killed in the context of being victimised; we interpret these IPHs as violent resistance.

In contrast, male perpetrators' claims of acting in self-defence seemed to be false justifications for the killing, as when a male perpetrator claimed that his knife wounds resulted from his wife having attacked him. According to his children, however, he had inflicted them on himself after he killed her. The one exception was the same-sex case, in which the perpetrator gave a more credible account. It is noteworthy that, similarly to the female perpetrators, he described defending himself from male violence. This indicates gendered differences which must be acknowledged.

Comparing the final trigger(s) described earlier with our previous results confirms the impression of blurred boundaries between the build-up to the killing and changing the project into actually killing one's partner, since both stages of the process contain similar triggers. Indeed, the escalation during the build-up may include several different triggers, the final of which pertains to changing the project. The gendered analysis of the build-up undertaken in our previous article is also valid when it comes to changing the project. Our findings indicate that some situational factors that trigger male-perpetrated IPH seem to differ from the corresponding factors in female-perpetrated IPH. While all the themes/triggers except hallucinating pertain to both male and female perpetrators, the situations evidently differ. When the context of the

killing was male-to-female IPV, men were perpetrators of both IPV and IPH, while women were victims of IPV and perpetrators of IPH. Feelings of rejection and jealousy seemed to be more common as triggers to kill for men than for women, while half of the female-perpetrated IPH were, according to our analysis, clear cases of violent resistance in response to IPV. Moreover, as presented in our previous article, none of the women – whether IPV victims or not – displayed possessiveness.

In comparison to Monckton Smith (2019) who describes eight stages of progression in male-to-female IPH, starting at pre-relationship, the time frame in our analysis is more limited. However, our description of this process does extend beyond the actual killing, as described in the next section.

The aftermath

When the killing is over, the victim is dead. There is a body to deal with, as well as the responsibility for a lethal, and in most cases criminal, act. In our coding of the aftermath, we have devoted especial attention to what the perpetrator does and says, a) 'at the scene', that is, immediately after the killing and in proximity to the victim, b) during the following week, and c) during interrogations and in the courtroom.

Dealing with the body

Some perpetrators described treating the body with 'tenderness', such as stroking the victim's cheek or washing the blood from her face. A few – mainly male – perpetrators desecrated the corpse and inflicted damage on it after the killing. Indeed, in one of the male-to-female cases the coroner stated that he had never seen such violent desecration of a body. This perpetrator was very drunk, but his actions nonetheless stand out as driven by hatred of the victim and a desire to destroy her (see Dobash and Dobash, 2015). Other perpetrators tried to conceal their crimes by removing the body from the scene and hiding it elsewhere (see analysis of 'Getting rid of the evidence', later in the article).

Trying to revive the victim

One way of dealing with the body was to try to revive it, descriptions of which included being confused or in denial regarding the victim's death:

> Afterwards, he tried to get a response from her but she didn't respond. He patted her cheeks but nothing happened. He lifted her up against his chest and heard a rattling sound in her. He didn't understand anything. He laid her down, tried to free her airways and put her in the recovery position. Then it occurred to him that he should try some sort of compressions, so he did that. A hissing sound just came out of her chest then. He thinks he did this for five to ten minutes. He got the feeling that she didn't exist anymore. However, it was unclear to him whether she had fainted or was dead.

Relating this to our coding of the aftermath – at the scene of the killing, during the following week and in the courtroom – trying to revive the victim is obviously

something that only could have happened at the scene. However, in the only case of poisoning and of a female perpetrator who apparently planned and prepared to kill her partner, the perpetrator's account of having tried to revive the victim seemed implausible and was thus a narrative constructed in the courtroom.

Drinking or taking drugs

Some perpetrators seem to have intoxicated themselves after the killing with alcohol and/or other substances. In the case of the perpetrator who killed two of his ex-partners, intoxication was both part of the aftermath of the first killing and of the build-up to the second one. In the case quoted in the following section, the perpetrator's hallucinations may have been related to his having consumed a large amount of amphetamine after realising that he had killed his partner. By drinking or taking drugs, the perpetrators may have tried to escape the inevitability of such a realisation.

Hallucinating

As evident from the previous section, some (male) perpetrators had killed under the influence of hallucinations, and may have continued to hallucinate after the killing. However, in one case, it seems that the hallucinations arose following the killing:

> [The perpetrator] recalls that he was hallucinating and thought that he was being pursued, and he lost both his keys and his wallet. However, he managed to find [the victim's] mobile phone in the car and called [name], a childhood friend and asked him to come.

Also exemplified in this quote is another, more recurring, theme, to which we turn next.

Contacting someone

Right after the killing, most perpetrators contacted someone. They stayed at the scene and called the police, and/or contacted a neighbour, friend or family member. A typical example:

> When [a neighbour] opened the door on the morning of [date], just before 7.30 a.m., [the perpetrator] just said: 'Call the police because I killed [the victim].'

Thus, these perpetrators rarely tried to conceal their crimes; instead, they attempted to communicate and seemed to want to tell someone what they had done. This was, however, not always so easy. In one case the perpetrator repeatedly tried to tell someone that he had killed his partner, but seemed not to have been listened to or believed. When, finally, one of the people the perpetrator had contacted thought that there might be some truth to what he had said, and the police were notified, the woman had been dead for three days.

The issue of why IPH perpetrators often immediately acknowledge having killed their partners warrants a deeper analysis that is beyond the scope of this article.

Escaping

While perpetrators most commonly remained at the scene and called for help, as described earlier, some chose to escape by leaving the crime scene, the city or the country. A female perpetrator apparently left the scene of the crime mainly because she wanted the police to take her into custody at some other location. Male perpetrators who escaped also seemed to want to avoid prosecution. Some male perpetrators tried to escape more indirectly, by committing suicide. Sometimes this seems to have been intended from the beginning, while in other cases the perpetrators seem to have made this decision after the killing, as exemplified in one perpetrator's statement:

> After having confirmed that [the victim] was dead he decided to kill himself. He left the apartment and went out, intending to step in front of a car, but there were children or young people in all the passing cars, so he decided against it. He went home and took a knife, sat down in the shower cabin and cut his wrists. The blood loss made him faint and he was 'out' for a while. When he woke up, he saw that he had stopped bleeding and that the blood had coagulated. Then he called the police.

It is, however, important to note that in some cases, it seems like an intended suicide story was presented to the court but was in fact false. This was the case when it came to the perpetrator who claimed that he had laid down next to his wife, whom he had accidentally shot, intending to shoot himself in the mouth, but was shaking so much due to intense emotion that he accidentally shot her again.

Getting rid of the evidence

Some perpetrators tried to get rid of the evidence of their crimes. Their behaviour sometimes seemed erratic, such as washing and cleaning up after the killing one minute, and admitting it the next, as in the case of one female perpetrator. Other times it was more clearly part of a strategy, adopted mainly by male perpetrators, of escaping prosecution and included removing and burying the body, burning the victim's clothes, and so on. These perpetrators also denied any involvement in the crime. In one case the perpetrator was acquitted since there was no technical evidence connecting him to the killing; there was no body or known crime scene, just a missing woman. It was only after several court hearings and the discovery of technical evidence that he was sentenced. Although only a few of the male perpetrators went to these lengths it is possible, as suggested by Fergusson and Pooley (2019), that male IPV perpetrators, who employ well-known control tactics to manipulate their partners and keep them in the relationship (see Stark, 2007), also try to control and manipulate the judicial system by destroying evidence and/or constructing a story denying or minimising their responsibility. This is relevant to keep in mind when perusing the upcoming themes, which mainly represent the narratives presented by the perpetrators in the courtroom.

'I did it'

Perpetrators often admitted to having killed their partners at the scene, following the killing and in the courtroom. In the courtroom, however, they often pleaded guilty to a lesser crime than they were being tried for, such as manslaughter instead of murder. A typical example:

> [The perpetrator] has admitted that he killed [the victim] at the time and in the way depicted in the prosecutor's report. However, [the perpetrator] denied being guilty of murder since he lacked intent to kill [the victim]. He has consequently pleaded guilty to aggravated assault and aggravated manslaughter.

Of the 50 perpetrators, only six fully accepted the charges. Most perpetrators pleaded guilty to a lesser crime, while others pleaded not guilty or claimed that they could not determine whether or not they were guilty due to memory loss (see later in the article). The 'it', in 'I did it' (as we have called this theme) was hence rarely murder. The perpetrators' pleas must be put into context: the sentence is determined in the courtroom and it is in the perpetrators' interest that it be more lenient. The perpetrator will have been advised by his/her lawyer concerning how to respond to the prosecutor's charges. However, abusive men – an appropriate depiction of most perpetrators – generally deny or minimise the abuse they inflict on women (Hearn, 1998) and this may also be relevant for the analysis. As we will show, the perpetrators' narratives were constructed so as to deny or minimise their responsibility. We use the concept of denial similarly to Dobash and Dobash (2011: 120):

> There are many facets of denial: of the murder itself, of previous abuse of the victim, of responsibility for the outcome of the event, of problematic relationships with the victim and/or women in general, and many others. For some, denial is absolute, whereas for others it is conditional and based on various rationales and notions that absolve the perpetrator of responsibility.

This touches both on denial of liability and denial of responsibility, a distinction which is important in criminal law. The analysis presented below, however, follows another logic and focuses on how the perpetrators oriented and presented themselves in relation to the killing which they had committed.

'It wasn't me'

This theme includes several subthemes, in addition to a simple denial of having killed the victim. Subthemes include the perpetrator claiming that it was an accident/mistake, that the victim must have killed herself, that the perpetrator was someone else or that the killing should be blamed on evil spirits, medication or the victim her-/himself. In one case, the perpetrator claimed that his gun had gone off during cleaning and that he had had no intent whatsoever to kill. Another perpetrator also claimed that the victim died accidentally:

> Then they went up to the attic in order to get clothes that belonged to him. When they left the attic, [the victim] came tumbling down the stairs and

> fell on [the perpetrator]. When he came to, [the victim] was lifeless and he carried her up to the attic in order to revive her, with no success. He was convinced then that she was dead and he panicked. When he saw the rope, it occurred to him to hang up the body in order to make it look like a suicide.

In this case, however, diligent police work proved that the perpetrator had practiced beforehand by hanging up a doll on the rafter on which the victim was later found hanging.

Claiming that someone else was responsible for the killing was some perpetrators' strategy at the scene, following the killing and in the courtroom. In some cases, however, this strategy eventually changed, as in the case of the female perpetrator who initially claimed that her partner had been stabbed in the throat by an unknown attacker but later recounted that it was, in fact, she who had stabbed him. However, even in cases where the perpetrators admitted to having killed their victims, their courtroom narratives were apparently constructed to minimise their responsibility.

'That's not what I'm like'

Some perpetrators described themselves as non-violent people. This included denying ever having been violent:

> He has never hit [the victim] in any way at any time. They absolutely did not have a violent home. He and [the victim] did not fight at home. He does not get angry in the manner [the victim's daughters] describe. They have never seen him fighting with [the victim]. He has never hit [the son].

The perpetrator quoted here also denied any involvement in the crime at all, and his assertions of not being violent seemed to be part of this general denial. Other perpetrators did acknowledge lethally violent behaviour, while emphasising that this was out of character:

> He loved [the victim] and is very distressed over what happened. He can't conceive of doing something like that to someone he has lived with for over thirty years.

Thus, according to this perpetrator, he was not violent although he had killed.

'I don't know what happened to my partner'

The (few and mainly male) perpetrators who hid the body of the victim and tried to conceal all traces of the crime also feigned ignorance of their partner's whereabouts; one of them seemed eager to portray his partner as someone who often went out with other men and thus could have put herself in danger. In another case, the perpetrator feigned ignorance regarding the cause of the victim's death; he took part in her family's mourning of her and wrote an obituary in the newspaper. There were also cases in which the (male or occasionally female) perpetrator acknowledged lethally violent behaviour, and/or being present at the scene, but claimed not to know how the victim's injuries had come about.

'I don't remember'

'Blackout' and 'memory loss' are recurring terms in perpetrators' description of the killings. Some perpetrators claimed no memory of events at all, while others, like the female perpetrator quoted here, stated that they had only vague recollections:

> She thought she felt a pulse but it might have been her own. She has no recollection of a guitar string. She does not think she used it on (the victim). She has looked at the pictures and thinks that it possibly was the scarf that caused the strangulation wounds. She might have pulled it off him in the hallway.

Some perpetrators who gave confused accounts at the scene and following the killing presented clearer recollections in the courtroom. Others claimed memory loss in the courtroom, but had related the events at the scene, for example when calling the police. Based on our data, it is not possible to draw any conclusions on the significance of these memory losses, or to ascertain their authenticity.

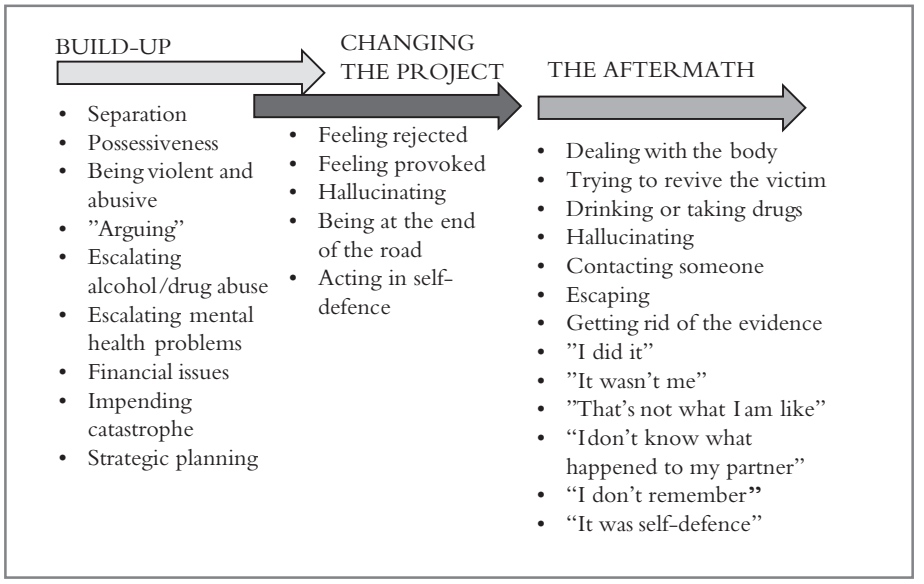
'It was self-defence'

Finally, in some cases the perpetrator claimed self-defence. Here we refer to the previous section, which also highlights the difficulty of analytically distinguishing aspects of changing of the project from aspects of the aftermath, since our analysis rests on courtroom narratives which are themselves part of the aftermath.

Conclusions

Our model of the IPH process contains three stages: the build-up, changing of the project and the aftermath, as summarised here:

Model 1: The IPH process



In this article, we have explored the last two stages of this process. Like Monckton Smith (2019), we found it difficult to discern when the build-up stage described in our previous article (Enander et al, 2021) turned into a changed project, that is, at what point the perpetrator decided to kill. This time-point mainly seemed to coincide with a final trigger: perpetrators feeling rejected or provoked, experiencing being compelled by external forces, being at the end of an emotional road where the killing seemed inevitable, or reacting in self-defence to a perceived threat. These triggers emerged as the final triggers following the escalation taking place during the build-up, exemplifying the blurred boundaries between the two stages. Regarding the aftermath, we have analysed what happens at the scene, following the killing and in the courtroom. At the scene and following the killing, the perpetrators generally contacted someone and admitted to having killed their partners. Only a few perpetrators concealed their crimes and denied knowledge of them. Male perpetrators went to greater lengths in this respect. In the courtroom, the perpetrators' narratives were apparently constructed to minimise responsibility and/or portray themselves as non-violent. These cases are diverse and complex, with one female perpetrator being acquitted on grounds of self-defence. Perpetrators' downplaying of their own responsibility may thus at times have been justified. Some, however, seem to have simply lied and denied obvious culpability.

The results of this study have implications for future policy reforms and research priorities. Primary prevention of IPV is essential: the social service and healthcare sectors have an important role to play here as they may observe early signs of violence. Furthermore, practitioners should be (given the tools to be) particularly attentive to escalation of known risk factors, and identify triggers for IPH. For secondary prevention, it is important to target perpetrators' minimising of responsibility. Future research should focus on deepening the understanding of the IPH process, applying a multi-method approach including interviews with family and friends bereaved by IPH.

Note

[1] The Västra Götaland Region comprises (approximately) 25,000 square metres and has 1.7 million inhabitants. It contains Sweden's second largest city and several smaller cities as well as countryside, and is thus often regarded as a kind of 'mini-Sweden'.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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