

# Female Offenders of Lethal and Severe Violence

## Mental Health, Risk Factors for Criminality and Offence Behaviour

Akademisk avhandling

Som för avläggande av medicine doktorsexamen vid Sahlgrenska akademien, Göteborgs universitet kommer att offentligens försvaras i hörsal Arvid Carlsson, Academicum, Medicinargatan 3, Göteborg, den 12 september 2025, klockan 13.00

av Karin Trägårdh

Fakultetsopponent:

Vivienne de Vogel, Professor.

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### Avhandlingen baseras på följande delarbeten

- I. Trägårdh, K., Nilsson, T., Granath, S., & Sturup, J. (2016). A Time Trend Study of Swedish Male and Female Homicide Offenders from 1990 to 2010. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*, 15(2):125-135.
- II. Trägårdh, K., Hildebrand Karlén, M., Andiné, P., & Nilsson, T. (2023). Lethal and Severe Violence: Characterizing Swedish Female Offenders With and Without a Severe Mental Disorder. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 2023;14:1143936.
- III. Trägårdh, K., Hildebrand Karlén, M., Andiné, P., & Nilsson, T. (2025). Links Between Psychopathy, Type of Violence, and Severe Mental Disorder Among Female Offenders of Lethal Violence in Sweden. *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health*, 0(0).
- IV. Trägårdh, K., Hildebrand Karlén, M., Andiné, P., & Nilsson, T. Measures of Risk for Violence and of Aggression in a Life History Perspective Linked to Lethal Violence Among Swedish Female Offenders. *Submitted*.

**SAHLGRENSKA AKADEMIN  
INSTITUTIONEN FÖR NEUROVETENSKAP OCH  
FYSIOLOGI**



# Female Offenders of Lethal and Severe Violence

## Mental Health, Risk Factors for Criminality and Offence Behaviour

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### Abstract

In about 10 % of homicides, offenders are females, forming an understudied group. The main aim of this thesis is to identify the qualities that distinguish female offenders of lethal and severe violence in terms of mental health, risk factors for violent criminality, and offence behaviour. **Paper I** examines incidence rates of female- and male-perpetrated homicide from 1990-2010 and explores similarities and differences between female and male homicide offenders for both those with child versus adult victims. The results indicate that homicide rates by both female and male offenders declined, with gender differences more prominent among offenders with adult victims. **Paper II** characterises female offenders of lethal and severe violence, with versus without a severe mental disorder (SMD), regarding demographics, mental health, substance use, and crime characteristics. Findings reveal that most female offenders faced challenges such as unemployment, adverse experiences, and mental health issues, and committed their crime within close relations. However, those with an SMD more often exhibited psychotic disorders and a more diverse range of victim-offender relationships, while they less often had substance use issues and prior criminality. **Paper III** investigates female offenders of lethal and severe violence, with versus without an SMD, assessing levels of psychopathy and types of violence. The females displayed relatively low levels of psychopathy (PCL-R) and primarily reactive rather than instrumental motives (Violent Incident Coding Sheet). The SMD group showed lower levels of psychopathy, and *provocation*, and higher levels of *arousal* and short-term *planning*. **Paper IV** examines, using established instruments, the relation between measures of risk for violence and of aggression in a life history perspective among female offenders of lethal and severe violence, identifying the strongest factors associated with lethal violence. The findings suggest that individuals charged with lethal offences exhibited fewer risk and aggression factors than those involved in non-lethal violence. **In conclusion**, female offenders of lethal and severe violence are characterised by adverse experiences and complex features, highlighting the need for targeted interventions across health care, social services, and law enforcement.

**Keywords:** female offenders, mental disorders, lethal violence, homicide, severe violence, risk factors, psychopathy, instrumental violence, reactive violence