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Neonaticide and Infanticide - a Case Series From One Forensic Unit in Croatia

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INTRODUCTION: Neonaticide denotes murder of a child during the first 24 hours of life; infanticide is the murder of a child under the twelve months of age. Neonaticide is a statistically rare delict and is defined as a „privileged murder“ according to the Croatian Criminal Law Act.

OBJECTIVE: To describe the cases of six women who faced criminal charges for neonaticide and infanticide. After a forensic psychiatric assessment of their level of criminal responsibility, these patients were considered guilty by reason of reduced sanity and some committed to a penal institution and others to ambulatory forensic treatment at the Forensic Unit of University Psychiatry Clinic Vrapce, Zagreb.

AIM: To report some risk factors for neonaticide and infanticide based on psychiatric diagnosis, age of perpetrator and socio-cultural background.

METHODS: These reports were analysed based on content of medical histories and court reports.

RESULTS: Borderline personality disorder, acute stress reaction, low intellectual capacity, level of education, poverty, younger age and disturbed family relations were most common among presented neonaticide and infanticide perpetrators at the Forensic Unit of the University Psychiatry Clinic Vrapce.

CONCLUSION: The investigation into cases of neonaticide and infanticide may offer an insight into the factors that may be of relevance in understanding how a mother may come to commit described delicts and enhance the odds for effective prevention. Identifying risk factors for neonaticide requires better psychiatric care for the parturient women in maternal wards and further nationwide research and coordination.