

**Chapter Seven**  
**Elder homicide in the UK (2010-2015): A gendered examination**  
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Despite public fascination with homicide, academic research remains comparatively lacking compared to the widespread media coverage of such offences. In particular, homicide involving older adults has received very little attention. Drawing on a Freedom of Information study in the UK, this chapter reports on 514 homicides recorded between 2010 and 2015 involving victims over the age of 59. Analysis of these cases revealed that homicide of older men is qualitatively different to homicide of older women, confirming the need for a gendered analysis of homicides across the life course. Using this novel study to illustrate our argument, we suggest there are several issues to be addressed concerning conceptualisations of violence against older people as well as methodological challenges to overcome. Implications for research, policy and practice are discussed.

### **Introduction**

Homicide is relatively uncommon in the UK, which has amongst the lowest levels across the globe (United Nations, 2013). Official data from England and Wales reveals 613 murders were recorded in 2017, an increase of 8% on the previous year (ONS, 2018). As with other violent offences, homicide disproportionately affects young men; between 2011-2014 1,077 of the total recorded offences involved a male victim and the majority of homicide victims were aged 20-24 (11.5%) followed closely by the 40-44 age group (ONS, 2015). Men also make up the majority of offenders; 90% of homicide suspects/offenders are male. However, there are important differences in the dynamics and characteristics of homicides involving different groups; for example, where the victim is female, the relationship between the victim and perpetrator differs from the relationship in male-victim cases; women are most likely to be killed by a spouse or ex-partner, whereas men are usually killed by acquaintances or strangers (ONS, 2017). Race and ethnicity have also been linked to specific risk-factors for homicide (e.g. Lo *et al*, 2013). Thus, the causes and risk factors for homicide are not universal and it is important to examine homicide against specific groups.

In the UK, homicide, a common law and gender-neutral offence, covers the offences of murder, manslaughter, corporate homicide and infanticide (ONS, 2015; Scottish Government, 2012). Homicide thus captures fatal violence against any individual. However, other (non-legal) terms are sometimes used to refer to lethal conflicts reflecting the specific dynamics of those offences and making distinctions between homicides. For example, 'parricide' refers to the killing of a parent or a stepparent by an offspring (Shon 2014), murder of children aged under a year old is termed 'infanticide'. Furthermore, it has been argued that the broad term homicide 'deletes from the sociological eye that special, gender-based evidence of woman-killing, which is different from the murder of men' (Corradi *et al*, 2016, p.977) hence 'femicide' is often the preferred term.

The term 'eldercide' has also been employed with reference to the killing of older people (Chu & Kraus, 2004), although this term tends not to be used in the UK context. This distinguishing term has emerged from a small number of studies in the USA that report homicides of older people as qualitatively different from those involving younger people. Those adopting this term propose that homicides of older people should be differently researched, theorised and

responded to, suggesting that homicides involving older victims are distinct from those involving younger people on the basis of old age. However, presently, there is insufficient evidence to support this in the UK and Europe. This 'bracketing off' of homicides against specific age groups can be problematic and presents particular challenges when attempting to examine risk factors and patterns of homicide across the life cycle (Holt and Shon, 2016). A further problem with the term 'eldercide' is that, in prioritising the age distinction, other victim demographics such as the sex/gender and socio-economic status of the victim and offender are obscured. Such factors have been central to understanding 'risk' and the specific dynamics of homicides in younger age groups.

Despite a growing interest in abuse against older people, criminology has largely neglected the non-youthful in their analysis of violent offending and victimization (XXXX, 2017a; XXXX, 2017b; Wahidin and Cain, 2005). Indeed, the absence of old age, across criminological inquiry has led some to describe the discipline as age-limited (see Cullen, 2011 for a discussion). There is growing awareness of the abuse of older adults by children (Miles and Condry, 2015) and other family members but, often referred to as elder abuse, this topic is dominated by health and social care scholarship, despite a range of criminal offences being subsumed within it. In relation to homicides, there have been very few attempts to incorporate older age, although some evidence has emerged from the parricide literature (see Holt, 2017). As Roberts and Willits (2012, p.185) point out, older victims of homicide 'are likely to become more frequent in absolute terms, and represent a greater share of all homicides, as aging baby boomers create a much larger population of older adults'. Consequently, there is likely to be an 'increasing prominence' of elder homicide (Roberts and Willits, 2012, p.185). Whilst the latter is speculative, the changing demographics and ageing nature of populations raises a range of interesting and important questions. Will the current trends in the murder of older people continue, or evolve with demographic trends? Will more older people be murdered simply because there are more older people, and if this will be the case, and given the growth in older populations, will their murderers also be older people? All of these questions suggest there is an impetus to develop an evidence base to inform prevention and intervention initiatives.

Drawing on data gathered from a five-year period through Freedom of Information requests, this chapter reports on data from the first national study to specifically examine homicide involving a victim aged 60 and over in the UK. We use 60 for the starting point, reflecting the World Health Organisations suggestion that 60 or 65 is the age commonly identified in most developed countries (WHO, 2002) as the start of older age. The remainder of the chapter is organised as follows. First, we review existing research on elder homicide. Second, we outline the research methodology. Third, we report our findings and reflect on how the study begins to mitigate the broad neglect of the study of older victims and offenders in criminology and discuss the implications of our key findings. Finally, we suggest there are several issues to be addressed concerning conceptualisations of violence against older people as well as methodological challenges to overcome.

### **Existing research on elder homicide**

Internationally, levels of homicide involving older people are amongst the lowest of all age groups (Block, 2013). Globally, the United Nations report that 43% of victims are aged 15-29 and the second most common age group is 30-44 (United Nations, 2013). In England and Wales, police data reveals 233 (around 15% of all homicides) people aged 60 or older were

intentionally killed between 2011/12-2013/14. However, very little is known about the victims, offenders and patterns of offences in older age groups. As with other types of violent crime, published data on homicides is descriptive, capturing a restricted number of variables, making it difficult to extract specific data on cases involving older victims (Dobash and Dobash, 2015). Furthermore, the published data in England and Wales groups older people into two age groups - 50-69 and 70 and over - which inhibits disaggregation of variables and reported characteristics<sup>1</sup>. It is therefore not surprising that few studies have examined the intricacies of homicides involving older people (Krienert and Walsh, 2010). Although the numbers may be small relative to offences involving younger groups, they are not insignificant and do not justify the neglect in research in this area.

The 'eldercide' research has mainly emerged from the USA. No studies specifically examining the issue have been published in the UK to date. Some US studies have compared homicides of elders with those of younger victims with inconsistent findings. Whilst Abrams *et al* (2007) report that elderly victims were more likely to be female, white, killed by a non-firearm and killed in their own home than younger victims, Fazel *et al* (2007) report that 71.8% of elderly victims were male, the most common method was a firearm (47.4%) and the most common relationship with the offender was acquaintance (28.7%). Other research has reported elderly victims are more likely than younger victims to be killed by strangers or family members in the context of another criminal offence (particularly burglary) (Ahmed and Menzies, 2002; Bachman *et al*, 2008; Nelsen and Huff-Corzine, 1998). The differences observed between older and younger victims has led some to conclude that homicide prevention and interventions that are appropriate for younger at-risk victims may be less so for older at-risk victims (Block, 2013; Dobash and Dobash, 2015). These studies have not specifically explored the gender patterns to fatal violence amongst the elderly.

In studies that have not used an age comparative approach, more nuanced findings emerge. A study by Krienert and Walsh (2010) analysed 828 cases of elder homicide (60 plus). The majority of victims were male (57.5%) aged 60-69 and the most common offender relationship was acquaintance (32%) followed by spouse (27%). However, subtle differences were observed when they analysed cases by the gender of the victim; women were more likely to be killed by a spouse (41.5%) or acquaintance (19.6%) whereas men were more likely to be killed by an acquaintance (42.2%) or adult child (16.2%). Buschmann *et al* (2016) analysed 55 cases of homicides in Berlin involving victims over 60 and report that victims of both sexes have an almost equal risk of being killed (51.6% women compared with 48.4% men). In most cases, the offender was a family member (46.7%) and the most common method involved a knife (24%) followed by strangulation/asphyxiation (22%). Little information is available on offenders although research suggests the majority are male (e.g. Fazel *et al*, 2007; Krienert and Walsh, 2010) and the victim's home is the most common location of homicide, ranging from 60-80% of cases analysed (Krienert and Walsh, 2010; Ahmed and Menzies, 2002; Abrams *et al*, 2007; Bachman and Meloy, 2008; Block, 2013; Buschmann *et al*, 2016).

No studies specifically examine homicide of older men and women in the UK. Two studies have very recently included analysis of homicide involving older women. First, Dobash and Dobash (2015) examined 40 cases involving a female victim aged 65 or older murdered by a male. None of these cases involved a spouse or ex-partner. They found two main contexts in which men murdered older women: those motivated by theft (48%) and those that involved a sexual element (53%). In the majority of cases the victim knew the offender (60%). At the

time of the murder, the average age of the offender was 30 and the average age of the victim was 75. The majority occurred in the victim's home (88%) and the most common method of killing was blunt force trauma (73%). Second, the Femicide Census (Women's Aid, 2016) report that women aged 66 and over are most likely to be killed by a partner or spouse (34%). Only 15% of all cases involved a theft or burglary.

In summary, existing empirical research is limited, producing contradictory findings. To some extent, these reflect the specific geographies of individual studies (for example higher rates of homicides involving firearms in the USA where legislation differs from other jurisdictions) different demographics in localized samples, and the varying methodologies across the studies (Krienet and Walsh, 2010). As Dobash and Dobash (2015) highlight there continues to be little detailed evidence about the circumstances and characteristics of homicides involving older women and men.

### **Research Methods**

The aim was to examine the nature and characteristics of homicides involving a victim aged 60 and over in the UK. The objectives were a) to develop a more comprehensive evidence base; and b) to examine the patterns and characteristics of elder homicide with a view to developing meaningful explanations and theoretical analysis.

The Office for National Statistics publishes an annual report on homicide drawing on data from the Homicide Index. Overall totals of homicides by age group are provided. There is no disaggregation by other personal characteristics (e.g. gender of victims and offenders, location of homicide, relationship between offender and victim) and offender age group data is not provided. Consequently, it is not possible to analyse homicide of older people using these datasets. Freedom of Information (FOI) requests were used to gather additional data from police forces in the UK. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the Freedom of Information Act 2002 (Scotland) - 'the FOI Acts' - provide citizens with the right to access data held by public authorities, including the police. The FOI Acts are widely used by journalists and the media report the findings. However, this tool has to date been under-utilised in social research (see Bows, 2017a for a detailed overview of this method).

An FOI request was sent by email to all 49 forces in the UK. The request comprised of two parts: the first part consisted of two questions asking for aggregated data on the total number of homicide offences recorded between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015, broken down by year, and the proportion involving a victim aged 60 or older. The second part of the request asked for demographic and characteristic data of cases involving a victim aged 60 or older, specifically: the gender of the victim and the perpetrator; the age of the victim and the offender at the time of the offence; the victim-perpetrator relationship (stranger, acquaintance, partner, friend, family member, carer), the location where the murder took place (victims home, perpetrators home, other residential, public place) and the method of killing (assault with weapon, stabbing, firearm). A multiple-category measure of nine-year subgroups (i.e. 60-69) was used. All 49 forces responded to the request with 45 forces indicating they had recorded at least one homicide involving a victim aged 60 and over during the study period.

A second, follow-up request was sent to all responding forces requesting data on whether the homicides involving an older victim were linked to any other separate offence (e.g. burglary).

The Home Office Counting Rules only require one crime per victim to be recorded (Code D). Not all forces had data on other offences that occurred at the same time as the homicide; 37 forces were able to provide information on whether another offence had been recorded at the same time as the homicide offence, although there may be some cases presented in this paper where another offence did occur at the same time as the homicide, but which was not recorded.

Data were put into an excel spreadsheet, coded and then inputted into SPSS v.20 for analysis. Univariate and bivariate analysis were conducted to examine the relationship between gender, age group and ethnicity of victims and perpetrators and the association between these variables and the relationship between victim and perpetrator, method and location of the homicides. Chi-square tests were used to explore whether significant relationships between categorical variables, namely the victim gender and other victim, offender and incident characteristics. This work builds on the small pool of existing work in the US which has explored victim, offender and incident characteristics and gender differences among elder homicides, extending this analysis to the UK context.

### **Findings**

Our analysis reveal the number of homicides involving a person aged 60 and over are low compared to younger age groups. Table 1 provides the overall number of recorded homicides by country in the UK. Over the five-year period, 514 cases were recorded across 45 forces in the UK, equating to around 100 homicides per year. Overall, the proportion of older victims was higher in England and Wales, with homicides of older people accounting for 17% of all recorded homicides.

*Table 1 here*

#### *Characteristics of victims*

The gender of the victim was available in all 514 cases. Most victims were male ( $n=285$ , 55%), a very similar picture to that reported by Krienert and Walsh (2010) in the US. It is interesting to note that the number of female victims ( $n= 230$ , 45%) is higher than in the general homicide data in England and Wales, where the most recent figures indicate 69% of victims were male and 31% female (ONS, 2017). There is therefore greater gender symmetry in elderly homicides compared to overall homicide data (Dobash and Dobash, 2015). These findings align to those found in the parricide literature where females are the majority of victims with a gender ratio of 30:70 (male/female) (Holt, 2017). Overall these findings suggest that most homicides of older women can be conceptualised as ‘domestic homicides’. Consequently, it is important to examine the specific gender dynamics of homicides in varying contexts. We return to this when we report on the relationship between victim and perpetrator and the location of homicides.

In terms of victim age, there is less symmetry with an overall decline in fatal violence with increasing age. The greatest number of victims were aged 60-69 (45%) – the younger band of the older-age spectrum – once again echoing the findings of Krienert and Walsh (2010) in the US. However, this decline is most obvious among male victims, where fatal violence more than halved in the 70-79 age group compared to those aged 60-69. Table 2. provides a breakdown of victim age groups by gender. Although the number of homicides of men and

women decreased in older age, women's risk remain more constant for the twenty-nine years between the ages of 60 - 89. The decline in female victimisation is less pronounced with increasing age. Significant chi-square results indicate that female victims are older than male victims, with female victims more likely to be aged 70-89 ( $n=135$ , 59%) compared with male victims ( $n=122$ , 43%)  $\chi^2(4, n=514) = 19.86, p = .001$ .

*Table 2 here*

The ethnicity of victims was known in just over 70% (368) of cases. The vast majority of victims are identified as 'white' (88%). This is roughly the same as the white population in the England and Wales (ONS, 2011). Overall 6% of victims were Asian, lower than the overall population in England and Wales but much higher than the estimated 2% population of Asian people aged 60 and over in England and Wales.

Similarly, in this study 2% of older victims were Black, slightly higher than the estimated population of Black people aged 60 and over in England and Wales (1.4%) (ONS, 2011). However, these figures are in contrast to the national homicide data where 77% of victims are white and a much higher proportion are Black (11%) or Asian (8%). The majority of victims from Black, Asian and 'other' groups were male; 5% of male victims are Asian and 2% were Black. Only 3% of female victims were Asian and less than 1% were Black. However, as around a third of all cases (28%) had missing ethnicity data, these findings are therefore incomplete and may not fully represent the ethnic demographic of elder homicide victims.

*Figure 1 here*

#### *Characteristics of offenders and offences*

Mirroring the national data for homicides and other violent offences, there was gender asymmetry in relation to homicide perpetrators (Dobash and Dobash, 2015). For cases where perpetrator gender was available, including where there are multiple perpetrators ( $n=617$  perpetrators and  $n=514$  victims in total) the vast majority of perpetrators of homicides involving older victims were male (85%). Overall a total of 86 perpetrators were female (14%); in these cases, the majority of victims (83%) were male.

Table 3 details the perpetrators age in single and multiple perpetrator cases. Where data was available ( $n=484$ ), most perpetrators were younger than the victim; 96% of perpetrators were aged under 60, with the most common perpetrator age group being 20-29 ( $n=125$ , 26%) followed by 30-39 ( $n=122$ , 25%) and then 40-49 ( $n=110$ , 23%). In eight per cent of cases, the perpetrator was aged 19 or under ( $n=38$ ). These findings echo the recent analysis of homicides by Dobash and Dobash (2015) who reported the average age of offenders was 30. Thus, victims are most likely to be killed by a perpetrator significantly younger than them. However, significant chi-square results reveal victim gender differences in the age of perpetrators, with men most likely to be killed by perpetrators aged 17-49 ( $n=194$ , 73%) whereas women were most likely to be killed by a perpetrator aged 50 and over ( $n=113$ , 52%)  $\chi^2(10, n=484) = 54.57, p = .000$ .

There is no comparable national data on the age of the perpetrator, as the Ministry of Justice and Home Office aggregate all perpetrators into two categories of 21 and over and 20 and under. However, in a separate FOI request sent to the Ministry of Justice in June 2017 by one

of the authors, data from 2016 shows the most common perpetrator age group for homicides (n=376) (incorporating murder and manslaughter) was 21-29 (n=145, 38%) followed by 30-39 (n=98, 26%) and 40-49 (n=77, 20%) (Ministry of Justice, 2017). Thus, regardless of the age of the victim, the national data and this study indicate perpetrators tend to be aged between 20-49.

*Table 3 here*

In terms of ethnicity, data was available for 375 (61%) perpetrators (including cases with multiple perpetrators). Figure 2 provides a breakdown of perpetrator ethnicity. Overall, the majority were 'White' (84%) while 5% were Black and 6% Asian. The national homicide data reports most people are killed by people of the same ethnic group (ONS, 2014). The present study had mixed findings: of the 23 cases involving an Asian victim 17 of the perpetrators were also Asian whilst 4 were White and 4 Black (several of these cases involved multiple perpetrators). However Black victims were most likely to be killed by White perpetrators (in the 7 cases involving a Black victim, four perpetrators were White).

*Figure 2 here*

#### Relationship

Victims and perpetrators were generally known to each other. Overall, where data was available (n=435) the most common relationship between victims and primary perpetrators<sup>ii</sup> was partner or spouse (23%) followed by son or daughter (20%). However, when examining the relationship and gender of the victim, another pattern emerges (see Table 4). Men were most likely to be killed by a stranger (n=58, 25%) or acquaintance (n=45, 20%) whereas women were most likely to be killed by a partner (79, 38%) or son/daughter (n=50, 24%). These findings were statistically significant  $\chi^2(10, n=514) = 99.22, p = 0.000$ . This mirrors the national picture where women are most likely to be killed by a family member (male spouse, partner or ex-partner or son/daughter). Moreover, reflecting the parricide literature (Holt, 2017) older women are more at risk of being killed by a son/daughter than older men. For male victims too, these findings are similar to the characteristics in younger age groups; the primary offenders in homicides involving male-victims of all ages are male acquaintances and strangers (ONS, 2017). These findings are based on better documented information about the characteristics of the victim and the offender and their relationship to one another and as such they are especially interesting in terms of what they mean for gendered theorizing and explanations of fatal violence amongst the elderly.

*Table 4 here*

#### Location and method

In keeping with the national homicide data, the most common location of homicides where data was available (n=487) was the victim's home and/or victim and perpetrator home (n=357, 73%). However, significant chi-square results indicate that men were much more likely than women to be killed in a 'public outdoor location'; just under 1 in 4 (n=, 62, 23%) were killed in this context compared to just (n=17, 8%) of women  $\chi^2(6, n=487) = 47.08, p = .000$ .

Across the 483 cases where data was available, the most common method of killing was stabbing ( $n=147$ , 30%) followed by assault without a weapon ( $n=111$ , 23%). Figure 3 provides an overview of the methods used across all cases.

*Figure 3 here*

Significant chi-square results reveal gender is crucial to understanding the dynamics of elder homicide. Men were more likely to be killed by assault without a weapon ( $n=81$ , 30%) with stabbing accounting for 27% ( $n=73$ ) of older male homicides. Women were most likely to be stabbed ( $n=74$ , 34%) followed by assault with a weapon ( $n=30$ , 14%)  $\chi^2(7, n=483) = 43.41, p = .000$ . Twice as many women were killed by asphyxiation or suffocation than men ( $n=24$  and 12 respectively). Thus, older women are most at risk of being stabbed or killed by another weapon by a male family member in their own home. Older men, on the other hand, are more likely to be beaten to death or stabbed by a male stranger or acquaintance in their own home or in a public outdoor location.

#### Multiple perpetrators

In a small number of cases ( $n=63$ , 12%) there was more than one perpetrator (in total 103 perpetrators and 63 victims). Overall, 63 cases had two perpetrators, 26 cases involved three perpetrators, 9 cases involved four perpetrators and 4 cases had five perpetrators. In one case, there were six perpetrators. Additional perpetrators were mostly male ( $n=84$ , 81%). Victims were also generally male ( $n=51$ , 81%). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most common relationship of the additional perpetrators was stranger ( $n=27$ , 26%) followed by acquaintance ( $n=23$ , 22%) although in 37 cases (36%) the relationship was 'unknown'. Most homicides involving multiple perpetrators occurred in the victim's home ( $n=33$ , 52%) or public outside location ( $n=15$ , 24%). The most common method of killing was assault without a weapon ( $n=20$ , 32%) followed by stabbing ( $n=16$ , 25%).

#### Linked to other offences

As noted earlier, some of the 'eldercide' literature from the USA has reported that homicides involving older victims are more likely to occur during the commission of another offence, typically burglary, theft or sexual offences. The FOI request asked if another offence was recorded at the same time as the homicide involving the older victim. Due to the way crimes are recorded in the UK, only the most serious offence is formally recorded (Home Office Counting Rules D) and forces do not routinely 'record' other offences which have occurred during, or at the same time as, a homicide. Nevertheless, a number of forces were able to provide contextual information for elder homicide cases. In over half of the cases (267) information was available about other crimes recorded at the same time as the homicide. In 190 of these cases (77%) no other crime was recorded. Figure 4. provides a breakdown of offences recorded in the remaining 57 cases; the most common offences recorded was theft ( $n=13$ ), robbery ( $n=10$ ) and assault ( $n=12$ ). Most of the victims were male ( $n=35$ , 61%) although given the small number of cases with available data and issues with recording practices, these findings should be read with caution.

*Figure 4 here*

## **Implications and Conclusions**

The findings reported here are drawn from the first-ever national analysis of homicides against people aged 60 and over in the UK drawing on FOI requests. Against the backdrop of a large gap in evidence about crime against older people, and despite a growth in elder abuse research (Burnes *et al*, 2015; Pillemer *et al*, 2016) and a flurry of interest in the rapidly growing aging prison population (Maschi and Aday, 2014; Maschi *et al*, 2015; Upton, 2014), the intersections of age and crime across the life-course are almost completely overshadowed by criminologists concerns to explain the stubborn offending patterns and desistance problems of young men.

Although the small amount of research looking at homicide of the elderly in the USA has produced inconsistent findings, that literature has a common conceptual and theoretical bias that views eldercide as a distinct phenomenon; that is, elder homicides are qualitatively different to younger homicides. Our findings both support and contrast with the previous research. Some differences in the victim, offender and incident characteristics in cases involving older victims are observed as compared with the national profile of homicide: there is greater victim gender symmetry where the ratio in elder homicides is 55:45 (male:female) compared to 69:31 in the general England and Wales homicide data (ONS, 2017). Information on Black and other minority ethnic characteristics is patchy but these populations appear under-represented in elder homicides compared with the national homicide data, where Black and other minority ethnic groups are over-represented compared with population rates. However, the main thrust of the findings are similar to the national profile of homicides; that is, the key dynamics and circumstances of elder homicide are linked to gender differences rather than age or ethnicity. More significantly, the gender symmetry in the homicides of older people appears to mask the continued risk to women of domestic homicide. Consequently, though the foundational evidence remains under-developed, our newly developed evidence base on elder homicide in the UK suggests that, rather than conceptualising elder homicides together homogeneously into 'eldercide', which suggests age is the primary distinction in these cases, gender should be the primary factor guiding empirical and theoretical developments in this field. The remainder of this discussion compares the homicide of older men and older women and considers future agendas for developing a more comprehensive understanding of homicide across the life course.

### **Homicide of older men**

Overall the majority of victims aged 60 and over are male (57%) although the gap between male and female victims is significantly smaller than reported in the national data (57% men and 43% women in this study compared to 69% and 31% women in the national homicide data). Most male victims were aged between 60-69 (53%) and were killed by other men (78%) who were aged between 20-29 (23%) and 30-39 (22%). In a third of cases the perpetrator was a stranger or acquaintance (20% and 15% respectively). It would therefore appear that older men are most likely to be killed by much younger men with whom they have a limited previous relationship. Although this is similar to the national profile of homicides of men, there are some interesting differences. The national data reveals men are usually killed by an acquaintance (35%) or by a stranger (27%) (ONS, 2017) whereas this is less pronounced for older men and though the categories of perpetrator are the same the risks from acquaintances and

strangers are reversed. The method of killing of older men also differs to the national data: in 2015/16, 39% of all homicides involving a male victim were a result of a sharp instrument compared to 21% who were killed by assault (hitting, kicking etc.) (ONS, 2017) whereas we found men were most likely to be killed by assault without a weapon (28%) closely followed by stabbing (26%). There is an urgent need for further research to provide contextual information about the homicide of older men which specifically explores the substantial age-gap between victims and offenders.

Previous research suggests that younger men who become victims of homicide may come from particular sub-groups, linked to unemployment (Shaw *et al*, 2005) and poverty/deprivation (McCall *et al*, 2012). This suggests class is also a salient factor in understanding fatal violence, although this is another characteristics that is hard to determine as it is not systematically collected in relation to homicide (Dorling, 2008). Further research which explores class is required to establish if this is also observed amongst the elderly.

A number of protective factors are traditionally associated with older age. These include older adults' inactivity, social isolation and their more restricted lifestyles. Older age sees a change to the routine activities associated with the risk of experiencing violence in younger groups (Roberts and Willits, 2012). These lifestyle changes are assumed to protect older people from experiencing crime and explain lower levels of victimization. Findings in this study cast doubt on these assumptions, particularly for men who continue to be killed by strangers or acquaintances in their home or public locations. This raises important questions about the nature of the risks men experience across the life-course.

### **Homicide of older women**

The homicide of older women is qualitatively different to that of older men. First, although the number of homicides of men and women decrease in older age, womens' risk remain more constant between the ages of 60 - 89. Second, although women are also most likely to be killed by a man, there are significant differences in the relationship between female victims and perpetrators. Most women are killed by a spouse (34%) (consistent with the national data on homicides of women) or a son/daughter (23%). In contrast, very few are killed by a stranger (9%) or acquaintance (6%); the most common perpetrators in older male homicide. Furthermore, although women are most likely to be killed in their own home (58%), very few are killed in public locations. Finally, women are most likely to be stabbed to death or killed by another weapon, whereas men are more likely to be killed by assault without a weapon.

Most of the cases involving female victims therefore align within existing domestic homicide definitions and reflect the national profile of female homicide: that is, in most cases, women are killed by a male spouse or partner/ex-partner in their own home usually by stabbing. Data presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4 and in Figure 3 all points towards the salience of a gender-based analysis. We suggest that existing conceptual and operational frameworks of domestic homicides are likely generalizable to elder homicide. In almost a quarter of older female homicide cases the perpetrator is an adult son (which aligns with the definition of domestic homicide and/or parricide). The dynamics of these homicides confirms that women not only face continued risks from their intimate partners across the life course but also that they face risks from their adult sons. This confirms recent analysis of parricides in England and Wales (Holt, 2017) which reports that men more likely to be killed by offspring when in their 50s, whereas

most women are killed by their offspring when in their 70s. This would suggest that age and gender are important in analyzing parricides as there appear to be some differences in older age groups compared to overall parricide profiles and characteristics. As Holt (2017) points out, whilst older age groups are generally considered to be 'low risk' for overall homicide victimization, 'it is certainly not 'low risk' for matricide victimisation' (see Holt, 2017, p.573). From an offending point of view, this also raises questions about the offending backgrounds and trajectories of offenders who kill elderly people and there is a need to examine emerging patterns, as recent research has highlighted the differences among offenders who begin offending in later life and those who begin in adolescence but continue across the life course (Jolliffe *et al*, 2017).

### **Future agendas for comparative research, theory and practice**

Our findings stack up evidence that gender matters in understanding fatal violence amongst the elderly. They point towards the conclusion that gender continues to be the primary risk factor for fatal violence in older age. The murder of older men as compared to the murder of older women is qualitatively different, mirroring the experience of fatal violence across the lifespan in many ways. Men continue to be at risk of being killed by strangers and acquaintances, whilst women continue to be at risk of being killed by partners and spouses with a possible increased risk of being killed by adult son/daughters in later life. Although there has been an emergence of research, and policy, examining domestic violence against older age groups over the last decade or so (Penhale, 2003; Straka and Montminy, 2006; Tetterton and Farnsworth, 2011; Weeks and Leblanc, 2011) and the present research contributes to this field by extending the gaze to fatal violence against older women, there is further scope to incorporate these insights into feminist analysis of violence against women. The complex gender, age and relationship dynamics of fatal violence amongst the elderly have yet to be comprehensively researched and theorized in the UK context.

The findings in this study corroborate and contrast with the existing US based 'eldercide' literature in a number of ways. First, although we find greater gender symmetry in terms of victims, older men were slightly more likely to be killed than women, reflecting some recent studies (Krienet and Walsh, 2010; Koehler *et al*, 2006, Abrams *et al*, 2007) but lower than some of the previous research (e.g. Shields *et al*, 2004; Falzon *et al*, 1998; Chu and Kraus, 2004). Second, although most victims were at the younger end of the scale (60-69) our findings confirm Krienet and Walsh (2010) study reporting female victims are more likely to be older than male victims. Consistent with the majority of previous elder homicide studies (E.G. Chu and Kraus, 2004; Krienet and Walsh, 2010; Abrams *et al*, 2007; Shields *et al*, 2004) our study found the majority of homicides occurred in the victim's residence, a finding consistent with the national data on homicide locations (ONS, 2017).

Some of the existing research has reported that older people are usually killed by strangers in their own home, often in the context of burglary (Ahmed and Menzies, 2002; Bachman and Meloy, 2008; Block, 2013; Nelsen and Huff-Corzine, 1998; Weaver *et al*, 2004; Chu and Kraus, 2004; Collins and Presnell, 2006; Titterington & Reyes, 2010; Fox and Levin, 1991; Copeland, 1986). Our study does not support these findings: although older men were most at risk of being killed by a stranger or acquaintance in their home, 77% of cases with available data showed no other crime had been committed. Similarly, our findings revealed the most com-

mon method was stabbing, although this was also gendered and contradicts much of the previous US literature which has found firearms to be the most common method, reflecting varying gun laws.

Our findings therefore share some similarities and differences with the US literature. Importantly, our findings are similar to Buschmann *et al's* (2016) analysis of elder homicide cases in Berlin in terms of victim gender, age and perpetrator gender, age, relationship and homicide location. To some extent these findings are expected, given gun regulation differences. However, the other findings point to a need to conduct further European research to develop international comparisons of elder homicides.

So far it seems, the evidence does not support the 'bracketing off' of elder homicide as a distinct phenomenon or the labelling of these offences as 'eldercide' based on age. Instead, we suggest a need for criminologists to incorporate violence against older people into their analyses and that a gender-sensitive approach should be adopted. Current understandings of violent crime and homicide are narrowly constructed around young victims and offenders, limiting a comprehensive evaluation of the causes and risk factors which impedes the development of interventions. Conceptualisations of violence against older people are currently framed within the context of elder abuse rather than criminal victimization of the elderly (Bows, 2017b). We thus concur with Cullen (2011) that an adolescent-limited criminology has had its day.

The way national data on homicide is currently collected and published obscures homicide against older people, as the data is not disaggregated by specific age groups and the majority of reports emerging from the data focus on the findings in relation to younger age groups (e.g. ONS, 2015). Researchers utilizing other methodologies to study homicide need to extend their samples to include older people.

These findings also have implications for criminal justice, safeguarding, health and social care practice. Awareness of the gender differences in relation to risk factors for homicide is important in developing early interventions and prevention initiatives. Although older men and women are most at risk of being killed in the home, the majority of homicides of older men would not come under domestic homicide definitions. Conversely, the killing of older women is almost always domestic homicide. There needs to be a greater awareness of the nature of risks for fatal violence in later life and both policy and training should consider how these risks transcend across the life course.

Building on the work of predominantly US scholars, we have illustrated the importance of having an evidence base on the patterning to, and characteristics of, fatal violence amongst the elderly. We have shown where the gaps in our knowledge are and what the limited data available tells us about gender patterns to elder homicide in the UK. We suggest a more systematic approach to gathering information and closer monitoring of trends in the murder of older people are needed as well as theoretical developments across criminology and feminist research.

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<sup>i i</sup> Data on overall number of homicides is broken down into smaller age groups, however data on victim, offender and offender characteristics are grouped into those aged 50-69 and those aged 70 and over.

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ii The relationship between victims and additional perpetrators in cases where there were multiple perpetrators is discussed separately