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CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:

In a recent interesting report Barraclough & Harris (**32**, 577–584) studied the epidemiology of murder–suicide in England and Wales. I would like to focus on their findings for the female murder–suicide perpetrator, as these findings present the possibility for some cross-cultural comparisons.

Barraclough & Harris reported that in the 5-year period (1988–92) there were 19 female perpetrated homicide–suicides (15% of the total). In these homicide–suicides there were 29 victims but only one of these victims was an adult male, all the rest (96·5%) were the perpetrator's children. These statistics are in harsh contrast to those reported for Dade County, Florida, USA for the 25-year period 1957–1981 (Fishbain *et al.* 1985). Here, there were 133 homicide–suicides of which 10 (7·5%) were female perpetrated. In all these cases the victim was of the opposite sex. None of the victims was the offspring of the perpetrator and 60% were lovers/ex-lovers.

Female homicide–suicide perpetrators are rare and unusual (Fishbain *et al.* 1985). Their percentages of all homicide–suicides have been reported to be: 8% in Philadelphia (Wolfgang, 1958); 6% in North Carolina (Palmer & Humphrey, 1980); and previously 40% for England/Wales (West, 1966). It appears, therefore, that the incidence of female perpetrated homicide–suicide could be greater in England/Wales *versus* certain USA locations. In addition, it appears that there may be cultural differences in the selection of victims of homicide–suicide in England/Wales *versus* the USA. Why this difference exists requires further research.

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