



W3 Child Murder by Parents: Psychiatry, Pediatrics, and Pathology

*Carl Wigren, MD**, Wigren Forensic PLLC, Seattle, WA 98101; *Susan Hatters-Friedman, MD**, University of Auckland, Auckland, NEW ZEALAND; *Renee Sorrentino, MD**, Institute for Sexual Wellness, Weymouth, MA 02188; *Josh Friedman, MD, PhD**, Cleveland, OH 44106; *J. Paul Fedoroff, MD*, Royal Ottawa Hospital, Ottawa, ON K1Z 7K4, CANADA

Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand child murder by parent cases from psychiatric, pediatric, and pathology perspectives. The discussion will include an understanding of parental motives and common factors behind child murder; diligently searching for the explanation and mechanism of the suspected inflicted injury; and courtroom testimony when understanding biases. The panel will include forensic psychiatrists (including perinatal psychiatry subspecialty), a child protection pediatrician, and a forensic pathologist. Case examples will be provided.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing competence in understanding the phenomenon of child murder by parents, effectively evaluating alleged perpetrators and the medical evaluation of such cases. This should lead to more scientific and less biased evaluations.

Diligence, Dedication, and Devotion are critical in evaluations of child murder by parents. Child murder by parents is often mischaracterized by well-meaning psychiatrists and jurists due to flawed interpretations of the literature. In two dozen nations, child murder by mothers has its own charge or defense of infanticide when the child killed is under a certain age. Those mothers may have no sentence or a sentence akin to that for manslaughter. Nothing comparable exists for fathers who kill. Yet mothers who make use of the defense are often not suffering from severe mental illness. Mothers who kill their children are often met with sympathy while fathers are vilified. Deservedness is much more nuanced. Research findings from both the psychiatric and the criminological studies will be discussed to further understand the characteristics of these parents. Conducting appropriate non-gender-biased insanity evaluations and mitigation evaluations in such cases will be reviewed. Fatal inflicted pediatric trauma in some cases are hospitalized prior to their passing and involve child protection pediatricians. Relevant knowledge and experience from child protection pediatrics will be presented. On the death of the child from suspected inflicted injury, forensic pathologists and medical examiners work to determine cause of death. With available information often incomplete, child abuse pediatricians and forensic pathologists provide opinions regarding plausible mechanisms of injury. This has potential impacts on the criminal court case as well as for custody.

Cases will be discussed that demonstrate these themes, with audience participation. A question-and-answer session at the end of the workshop will enable attendees to ask questions of the speakers. The goal of the panel is to educate attendees on the phenomenon of child murder by parents from the perspectives of forensic psychiatry, pediatrics, and pathology.

Child Murder, Filicide, Infanticide