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## Introduction

- ❖ There have been a lot of recent discussions surrounding filicide, however, the act of mothers and fathers killing their children has been around at least since the early Roman era when it was legal for fathers to kill their children (West, 2007).
- ❖ Contemporary cases of filicide have led to many criminal proceedings; thus, forensic psychologists and attorneys should understand the nature and causes of filicide.
- ❖ The factors that influence filicide vary depending on the parent, the age of the child, and other factors such as parent mental health, and socioeconomic status.
- ❖ The mental health of the parent is one of the most significant contributors to filicide.
- ❖ Although post-partum depression is one of the most well-known psychological disorders present after birth, parents experience an array of other stressors that can result in the development of other mental health conditions.
- ❖ Although the exact cause of filicide is unknown, perpetrators of filicide share similar psychological characteristics (see column 3).

## Definitions

- ❖ Filicide – the killing of one’s own child
- ❖ Infanticide – the murder of a child under the age of one year
- ❖ Neonaticide – the murder of an infant within the first 24 hours after birth (Bourget et al., 2007)

## Motives of Filicide

- ❖ Altruistic filicide – Done with the belief that death is in the child’s best interest
- ❖ Acutely psychotic filicide – Performed by parents who are experiencing some form of psychosis
- ❖ Unwanted child filicide – Resulting when at least one parent did not want the child
- ❖ Accidental filicide – Performed accidentally, with no intent to harm the child
- ❖ Spouse revenge filicide – Done as an act of revenge by a spouse, most commonly performed by step-parents

(Krischer, Stone, Sevecke, & Steinmeyer, 2007)

## Examples of Filicide

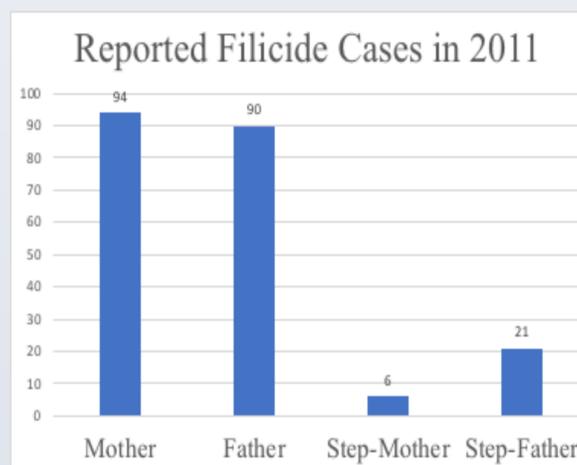
- ❖ Andrea Yates killed her five children in 2001 because she believed it was best for them (altruistic filicide)
- ❖ Judith Williams murdered her son and committed suicide in 2009 during a psychotic episode (acutely psychotic filicide)
- ❖ Susan Smith killed her children in 1995 because she wanted to have a relationship with a man who did not want children (unwanted child filicide)
- ❖ Sam Barwick accidentally suffocated his 6 month old son in 2009 (accidental filicide)
- ❖ Elaine Campione murdered her two daughters to prevent her soon to be ex-husband from sharing custody of their children (spouse revenge filicide)

## Characteristics of Perpetrators

- ❖ History of substance abuse
- ❖ Previous incarceration
- ❖ Financial stress
- ❖ Unemployment
- ❖ Exhaustion
- ❖ History of mental illness or personality disorder

(Flynn et al., 2013; Friedman & Resnick, 2009; Léveillé, Marleau & Dubé, 2007)

## Data



## Discussion

- ❖ Neonaticide is usually performed by biological mothers who are young and were not planning on the pregnancy (Friedman & Resnick, 2007).
- ❖ Perpetrators of infanticide and filicide of older children have very similar psychological characteristics. In both forms, parents were under financial stress and suffering from exhaustion, and mothers were more likely to be unemployed and spending most their time with their children (Friedman & Resnick, 2009).
- ❖ About 40% of mothers who committed filicide and infanticide have a history of mental illness or a personality disorder, with a diagnosis of a personality disorder being the most common (Flynn, Shaw & Abel, 2013).
- ❖ Mothers are more often the perpetrators of neonaticide and infanticide, whereas 78% of perpetrators of filicide of older children are fathers (Friedman & Resnick, 2009).
- ❖ Overall, mothers and fathers perpetrate filicide equally (see figure to the left), although fathers are less often studied.

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