

Autos Careers Classifieds Homes



Ticking homicidal time bombs threaten families from within

By NADIA MOHARIB, CALGARY SUN

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About 70% of family killing cases have a history of domestic violence, so-called red flags warning of deadly endings to come.

But a U.S. expert in familicide, where an individual kills a current or former partner, one or more of their children and often themselves, says about 30% of cases essentially are the culmination of ticking time bombs going off where there were no warnings to offer an opportunity for intervention.

"These are middle class folks who are seen, sometimes as pillars of the community who kill themselves and often their entire family in times of distress," says Neil Websdale, a Northern Arizona University criminology professor who was in Calgary this week for a domestic violence conference.

"A small number are ticking time bombs."

The Familicidal Hearts: The Emotional Styles of 211 Killers author, says while there were not the obvious markers in those cases, killers were often triggered by issues from financial troubles to job loss, impeding bankruptcy and infidelity issues.

It's no coincidence, he says, familicides doubled in the second half of 2008, in the U.S., as the economy tanked.

Many killers in cases he studied suffered from deep depression, anxiety, fear and were often "emotionally constipated," leaving them unwilling to talk about pressures which percolated to deadly consequences.

One case, for instance, saw 14 months of planning into the killings of a man, his wife and his son — a case with no history of domestic violence and no signs to hint at the horror to happen.

"It is nearly always a man who (feels) he has failed as a lover, provider, whatever it is," Websdale says.

"There is a sense of very, very deep shame and humiliation ...they don't talk about it, they keep it in.

"He kills because he has no other way of dealing with the shame and humiliation."

Last year, there were nine domestic homicides in Calgary — including a case which was one victim away from being familicide.

In that case last November, Ying Louie arrived home to find her two children, 13-year-old Jason and nine-year-old Jane, slain.

She was allegedly in a fight for her life with husband, James Bing, when police arrived.

Bing is charged with two counts of first-degree murder and attempted murder.

"I think had we not interrupted that, he would have completed a familicide," domestic violence Staff Sgt. Patty McCallum says

In 2009, Joshua Lall killed his tenant, wife and their two children in his Dalhousie home where he was found dead inches from the family's sole survivor, his infant daughter in her crib.

McCallum says investigators still talk about the case and are still baffled as to how it might have been prevented.

About 40 U.S. states review so-called family annihilators — the bulk of which are white middle-aged men and often victims of child abuse says Websdale.

Ontario, Manitoba and New Brunswick review domestic homicides and Alberta justice officials are looking at introducing a similar plan — something McCallum and agencies working to curb domestic violence, like HomeFront, support.

“We need to have more understanding of places where we can intervene sooner,” she says.

“To learn more about prevention, this is the discussion

well worth having.”

It’s especially true in killings which unfold seemingly “out of the blue,” without the typical warnings which can lead to getting help, says McCallum.

“They tend to keep everything in, it’s the people next door, nothing overtly wrong,” she says.

“How do we stop this? How do we prevent those murders from happening?”

Education is key, along with police and social agencies working closely to build a stronger safety net with fewer holes.

Recently, to that end, a \$1.5-million initiative was launched in Calgary.

The three-year Domestic Conflict Response Team pilot project pairs up teams of social workers and specialized police, working closely with child welfare officials, to follow up on such cases to identify those as high-risk or chronic to ensure they get resources they need.

About 33% of homicides in Canada are the result of cases escalating to deadly proportions and the aim is to identify and intervene before that happens.

McCallum says reducing the risk comes down to identifying a brewing problem and following through on it.

In some cases family, friends or even the eventual killer “starts to notice things but don’t know what to do with it.”

In the Lall case, help was sought but didn’t prove to be in time or sufficient to thwart the eventual murders.

Even the father-who-would-become-a-mass-killer, reached out for help, getting counselling and making a frantic call to his parents saying he was having a mental breakdown days before.

They were on their way from Eastern Canada to support him when he unleashed his deadly terror.

Sadly, children, who become collateral damage in a murderous meltdown, are least able to reach out for help even if they know it’s needed to spare their lives.

Websdale says killers often slaughter their own offspring in familicides because they are “self-centered, narcissistic” and acting on “male entitlement.”

Other times, they have a twisted sense of altruism.

“They genuinely feel, albeit misguidedly, they are doing the kids and the wife a favour by taking them out,” he says.

“They are saving them from poverty, destitution, pain ... they can’t leave them behind.”

McCallum says cases where kids are killed or even survive and live with the loss or witnessing the murder of family members are heartbreaking and often haunting.

“Those are the worst, they just get taken out because they happen to be there ... ‘or if I can’t take care of you, no one else will,’” she says.

“Sometimes, in their own mind, they believe the best option is to kill them all.”

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