

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

Media contact: Heather Stieglitz
(214) 648-3404

or e-mail: heather.stieglitz@email.swmed.edu

INVESTIGATORS CONSTRUCT DETAILED CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM FOR CHILD HOMICIDE BY A PARENT

DALLAS – November 19, 1999 – Investigators at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas are providing insight into a most disturbing crime – the killing of a child by a parent, or filicide.

In a recent article in *The American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology*, Dr. Joseph Guileyardo, UT Southwestern assistant professor of pathology, and colleagues described a rare case of familial filicide in which twin sisters, in separate attempts, tried to kill their own children; one succeeded. Because they knew of no similar cases involving siblings, the researchers reviewed the literature and identified and characterized 16 subtypes of filicide, providing a framework of motives, causes and precipitating factors. They believe that a better understanding of these categories will lead to strategies for prevention.

“To protect potential child homicide victims, it is necessary to know how and why they are killed,” said Guileyardo, who also is deputy chief medical examiner at the Southwestern Institute of Forensic Sciences. “We, as medical examiners, see a much wider variety of filicide case types than those written about in psychiatric literature. We are in a unique position to set up this classification system that will aid in understanding such homicides.”

The new system classifies filicide based on the primary motive or cause that led to the act. The classification system allows for comparison of a case at hand with previously described patterns of behavior.

The subtypes – each characterized in detail in the article – consist of altruism, euthanasia, acute psychosis, postpartum mental disorder, unwanted child, unwanted pregnancy, angry impulse, spousal revenge, sexual abuse, Munchausen syndrome by proxy, violent older child, negligence and neglect, sadism and punishment, drug and alcohol abuse, seizure disorder, and innocent bystander.

“Community access to immediate psychiatric care, prompt intervention at the first report

(MORE)

FILICIDE - 2

of child abuse and social agencies cognizant of the need for taking 'unwanted' children all would be of help in preventing filicide," Guileyardo said.

In addition to Guileyardo, Dr. Jeffrey Barnard, UT Southwestern professor of pathology and chief medical examiner of Dallas County, and Dr. Joseph A. Prahlow, former UT Southwestern assistant professor of pathology participated in this study.

###

This news release is available on our World Wide Web home page at
http://www.swmed.edu/home_pages/news/

To automatically receive news releases from UT Southwestern via e-mail, send a message to
UTSWNEWS-REQUEST@listserv.swmed.edu. Leave the subject line blank and in the text box, type
SUB UTSWNEWS