

The METROWEST DAILY NEWS

Many motives spark killings: Experts say sex and money likely not the only factors

By Cathy Flynn / Daily News Staff

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Sex and money. Can the yearning for them drive a man to murder?

According to psychologists who treat troubled men, sex and money can be powerful motivators, but when someone murders a wife and child, as Neil Entwistle is accused of doing, other factors are in play.

"I'm unsure where Neil's head is at," said Jack Hagenbuch, who runs the "Respect" domestic violence program at the Wayside Youth and Family Support Network. "Financial woes can be troubling, but to murder your child? There's got to be something else going on here."

Hagenbuch said most men who hurt their wives do it for a sense of control. "Most batterers are normal-looking people who have a public and a private front," he said. "It's not about being out of control, but being in control. If work or another part of his life is out of control, he tries harder to control the most vulnerable people in his life."

Cambridge psychologist David Adams, who is writing a book about men who kill their partners, said killers typically have a strong narcissistic streak, which can make them very charming yet very ruthless.

"They have an inability to recognize other people's perspectives, and they have a strong sense of entitlement," said Adams, who has worked with 37 killers. "They usually project a very positive public image, which is often confused with sensitivity. They can scan the environment and figure out just what everybody wants them to say so they can manipulate people."

Some murderers are the jealous type who murder when their partner threatens to leave, and others abuse drugs or alcohol, said Adams. Some are "materialistic/possessive" types who yearn for a different life and want their partners out of the way.

"Chuck Stuart (who murdered his pregnant wife in 1989) was that type because he wanted to start a restaurant with a new partner," said Adams.

And an astonishing 30 percent of the murderers also plan to kill themselves, Adams said. Based on what he has seen of the Entwistle case, he said Neil could have been such a type, or he could have been a materialistic person who was seeing his world fall apart.

But Adams and the other psychologists said they are waiting to see the real Neil before trying to analyze what happened.

"You can come up with 100 different scenarios when somebody kills someone they love," said Dr. Irving Jacobs, a psychologist with Tri-Valley Counseling Services in Milford, "especially when they look like a normal individual on the outside."

Poor impulse control is one of the common threads linking people who abuse or kill their loved ones, said Jacobs, who says he has treated dozens of batterers over the years. While sex can be a powerful force in a man's life, Jacobs said he has never heard of anyone using lack of sex as an excuse to murder. Nor is financial difficulty, in itself, an excuse.

"There are many people who are in debt like him," he said. "The money problems are not the answer to this. It's just part of the picture."

Arthur Ciaramicoli, a Hopkinton psychologist and author, said that people in American and European cultures often feel undervalued if they're not rich or beautiful enough. It's what motivates many to live above their means in order to keep up appearances. The Entwistles rented a grand home, took expensive vacations and leased a BMW despite Neil not having a job and being deeply in debt.

"The house and the car shows where his mind is at," said Ciaramicoli, author of the book, "Performance Addiction."

Societal pressures to have it all -- whether it's money or sex -- often causes people to do strange things, he said.

"People set goals based on what they think will make them respected and appreciated, and they never get there," said Ciaramicoli. "We are obsessed with money and with beauty, and that's our main drive.

"As a result, many driven men don't develop the interpersonal skills necessary for intimacy. They come home and they want sex on demand, like they are holding a remote."

Ciaramicoli said most driven men don't become violent, and he suspects that drugs or alcohol could have been a problem in the Entwistle case. But he cautioned that financial setbacks can be devastating to people who are obsessed with keeping up appearances.

"All humans do what we need to do to be loved," he said. "Unfortunately, our society values money and beauty, and not surprisingly we have the highest depression rate in the world. Europe and Canada are not far behind us."

And what if he had been Neil Entwistle and found himself financially devastated? Ciaramicoli said he would focus on taking care of himself physically and emotionally, and strengthen his relationships with loved ones.

"I would have downsized and tried not to be overly embarrassed about it," he said. "If you have friends and love other people, you can be resilient."