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Newborn Kidnapping by Cesarean Section

ABSTRACT: A study of 30 cases of violence from a total sample of 199 cases of infant abductions between the years 1983 and 2000 included a subsample of six (or 20%) where the kidnapping was by cesarean section. The six cases are classified by type of crime. Four cases were classified as personal cause homicide, subtype cesarean section homicide; one case classified as personal cause, subtype domestic homicide, and one case classified as a criminal enterprise homicide. The behavioral profiles of the abductors included a confidence style approach to the victim mother, deception, and planning of the cesarean section. The forensic psychodynamics suggest a dual motive to cement a failing partner relationship and to fulfill a childbearing and delivery fantasy. Cesarean section murder suggests a new category of personal cause homicide.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, forensic behavioral science, Cesarean section homicide, infant abduction, infant kidnapping, homicide

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) has long been concerned with the abduction of children (birth through six months) by nonfamily members. It has been studying its cases since the mid-1990s, focusing on the abductors (1), family reaction (2), and has been providing guidelines for prevention (3). A recent study of 199 cases reported to the Center between 1983 and 2000 revealed 30 cases in which violence was used. In those cases, 60% of the mothers were killed and six newborns (20% of the sample) extracted by cesarean section (4). Because of the unusual nature of this crime, Ketzy, et al. (5), in reporting on a 1987 case, wrote that they would be interested in hearing from others who have encountered cesarean section as a method of child stealing. Their literature search revealed two cases reported in the popular literature (6) and they learned of two additional cases not reported in the literature. In response to their request to learn of more cases and to add to a developing data base (4), we are including brief vignettes of six cases from our files.

Case 1

The first case is also reported by Yutzy, Wolfson, and Resnick (5). In 1987, Darci Pierce, age 19 and married, approached a pregnant woman, as she left a prenatal clinic at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Using a gun (replica), the abductor forced the mother into her car, and initially drove to her own home, where she had surgical instruments and medical books. When she discovered that her husband was at home, the abductor drove to an

isolated desert area, strangled the mother to unconsciousness, and then, using a set of car keys, performed a cesarean section and delivered a live baby girl. She then hid the body of the victim mother under some bushes. Needing a birth certificate, the abductor drove to a local car dealership where she told a friend that she had just delivered a baby. She was taken to the local hospital where the on-call physician performed a gynecological examination, which revealed she had not recently given birth to a baby. The authorities were notified and Pierce was taken into custody.

At trial, the psychiatric expert for the defense testified that the defendant suffered from atypical dissociative disorder, somatization, factitious disorder, borderline personality disorder, and narcissistic personality disorder. The expert's opinion was that her dissociation qualified her for "insanity" because she could not refrain from her act.

The prosecution's psychiatric expert testified that the defendant had antisocial personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, and narcissistic personality disorder. It was his opinion that the personality disorders did not qualify as a mental disease for the purpose of an insanity defense and that these disorders did not impair her cognition or her volition with regard to the crimes (5). The jury found Ms. Pierce guilty of the charges, but mentally ill (GBMI). She was incarcerated in prison and deemed eligible for change in status in 30 years.

Case 2

In 1992, a pregnant woman in Brownsville, Texas was befriended by two sisters whom she met at a social gathering of mutual acquaintances several months before the abduction. Rosa Botello, in particular, worked at establishing the relationship with the victim mother and she introduced the victim mother to her sister, Paulyna Botello, who claimed that she, too, was pregnant. The three women would often go shopping together, so that on the day of the abduction, when the sisters asked the victim mother to go shopping in Matamoros, Mexico, she agreed, and they picked her up at her home. That day, Paulyna Botello said she needed to stop and see her obstetrician and persuaded the victim mother to accompany her to see the doctor as well. The sisters, knowing that the victim mother

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was on welfare and did not have access to a great deal of money, told her that she should see this doctor as well. The victim mother declined, but the sisters told her that the visit would be their “gift” to her for the new baby. The victim mother accepted this “gift” and agreed to let the doctor examine her. He told the sisters that the victim mother was fine and that he would meet them at the other office in Mexico. The victim was confused by this conversation, but the sisters quickly changed the subject. They went to the designated clinic, where they had to wait a short time for the doctor to arrive. He arrived and re-examined the victim mother. While she was being examined, she was given an injection that rendered her unconscious. The doctor performed a cesarean section and gave the baby to the two sisters. Approximately two days after the C-section, the victim mother was told by the clinic staff that the sisters had her son. Before releasing the victim mother, the clinic staff had her sign a form that released them from any liability as to what had occurred in their facility (apparently the head of the clinic began to think that something was not quite right about this case). During the two days the victim mother was in the clinic, her family reported her missing to the Brownsville Police Department. The victim mother was released from the clinic and managed to get back to her home in Brownsville where she reported the incident to the authorities.

Paulyna Botello claimed that the victim mother agreed to give up the baby because of financial problems; but the victim mother disputed that statement. Both Botello sisters were charged in Mexico with trafficking a minor and Paulyna Botello was extradited back to Mexico to stand trial. The family members of the victim mother were persistent in their efforts to exact justice from the Mexican government. Through channels, they were able to get the Mexican government to issue a provisional arrest warrant for both of the female abductors. Paulyna Botello was known to live in McAllen, Texas with her children and a female roommate and was believed to have been receiving some sort of benefits for her four children (three girls and one boy). The child eventually returned to the USA with Paulyna Botello and an arrest warrant was issued. She insisted that the child was hers. After recovery of the child, forensic tests on blood samples determined the victim mother was in fact the child’s biological mother. The doctor who performed the cesarean section was believed to be intimidated by Rosa Botello and refused to comment on the matter. Paulyna Botello had obtained a birth certificate from a midwife. It was unknown whether she paid for the birth certificate, threatened the midwife, or simply conned her into giving her the document.

It was alleged that Paulyna Botello was the girlfriend of a Mexican drug lord, and she claimed that the child was his. It was unconfirmed that she had had a hysterectomy. In the meantime, the mother of the child was killed in an unrelated matter. Two police officers were accused of the murder but were found not guilty. The child was then turned over to the maternal grandmother. Paulyna Botello was eventually tried in Mexico for the abduction and received a few months in jail. Rosa Botello has evaded arrest.

Case 3

In Addison, Illinois in 1995, Jacqueline Williams, Fedell Caffey, and Lavern Ward, entered the home of Ward’s ex-girlfriend who was nine months pregnant. They entered despite the fact that there had been a protective order issued against Ward for domestic abuse. The ex-girlfriend had a 19-month old son by him. According to statements made by the primary abductor, Williams, after entering the home, shot the victim mother in the head. Next, Caffey and Ward stabbed her 10-year old daughter to death, and then the three assailants participated in a crude C-section on the mother with scissors or a knife to remove the newborn. After they cleaned

up the baby, they took the eight-year old son of the victim mother, and left the home. The suspects returned to the home of Williams and Caffey with both children. Sometime during the evening Williams and Caffey were reported to have killed the eight-year old child by cutting his throat and dumping his body ten miles from the original crime.

Caffey called his cousin early the next morning to tell him “he had a son.” The victim mother’s body was found by her boyfriend when he came home from work along with Ward’s 19 month old son who was unharmed.

The reason given for the abduction is that Caffey wanted a male child by Williams, who was putting a lot of pressure on her. Williams faked a pregnancy to coincide with that of the victim mother. Caffey and Williams were both aware that the victim mother was pregnant and that the child was male. The child’s father was believed (by the abductors) to be Ward’s.

Prior arrests indicated Williams had been convicted for theft and forgery; Caffey had been convicted for attempted theft, domestic battery, and unlawful use of a weapon; and Ward had a conviction for striking a police officer and served three years. At trial, Williams was convicted and given two life sentences. The abuse, which the abductor received at the hands of her boyfriend, was used as a mitigating defense in the sentencing portion of the trial.

Case 4

In Tuscaloosa, Alabama, On January 31, 1996, a 17-year old pregnant teenager was contacted by a former friend, Felecia Scott, age 29. Scott had two sons by a previous relationship and had had a hysterectomy in 1994 (confirmed by medical records). She had, however, told her common-law partner and family that she was pregnant.

On the pretext of going out to dinner, Scott, who wanted a baby to cement the relationship with her common-law partner, met the victim mother who was 9 months pregnant. When the victim mother did not return home by the next day, the family reported her as missing. Scott returned home in the early morning hours of 2/1/96 and told her husband that she had had her baby and she needed to get to Birmingham to see her doctor.

Scott and her partner left in the middle of night and arrived at her sister’s home. Scott took the baby to the hospital, had him checked and he was then released. She returned to Tuscaloosa where the police were looking for the missing victim mother and who wanted to interview her since she was last seen with the victim mother. She showed the police the hospital paperwork but realized they would find out she had had a hysterectomy. The abductor then went to her father and told him that she was had been riding [in a car] with her friend, that they had been stopped by the police and that she fainted. She stated that when she woke up she found the baby in car and her friend gone. The father did not believe the story and was going to ask her to leave when the police arrive at his home on 2/8/96 and arrested his daughter.

On 3/14/1996, the victim mother’s body was located at the bottom of a 50-ft ravine approximately 60 miles northwest of Tuscaloosa, near Birmingham, stuffed into a plastic garbage can sealed with duct tape. The victim mother had been shot repeatedly in the head. Scott’s sister’s home was approximately 2.4 miles away from the site where the body was found. The victim mother’s abdomen had been sliced open. Autopsy results indicated that the victim mother had died about 12 h after she departed with the abductor. The abductor had faked a pregnancy two years before, while in another relationship. To extricate herself from the lie, she claimed that she had a miscarriage. Her present partner had not been told of

the hysterectomy. Her mother believed her daughter had a partial hysterectomy and still might have been able to have children.

Case 5

On September 14, 1998, a 40-year old woman of Fresno, California, was abducted from her home when she was 8 1/2 months pregnant with her 6th child. A few days earlier Josephina Saldana, also age 40, had called and offered the family gifts of free baby furniture and a one-year supply of diapers. Saldana knocked on the woman's door at 1:30 p.m. on the day of the abduction and told the victim mother that they needed to go to a warehouse to collect the gifts. The entire trip should have taken no more than 20 min. When the victim mother did not return by 3:00 p.m., the family called the police. Witnesses reported seeing the victim and perpetrator arguing outside of a restaurant that was 30 miles away.

The next day, Saldana showed up at a hospital with a dead fetus that she claimed she had given birth to in the car. There was a possible link between the victim mother and the abductor. The victim mother suffered from diabetes and uterine cancer and was a patient at the same hospital where the abductor worked as a Spanish-English translator. A farm worker who rented a home on the farm of the abductor told law enforcement that he had seen a corpse of an adult on the property on September 15th. However, he did not tell police about the body until September 17th when he was questioned. By then the body was gone. The victim mother's body was found in pieces on October 6th in the trash in Tijuana, Mexico. Saldana was arrested. She claimed she had a miscarriage, but two of her former husbands indicate that she was lying because she had a hysterectomy over 10 years previously.

The abductor was found guilty of kidnapping and two counts of murder. Two days after the trial she was found hanging by a sheet in jail. She left five letters and a lipstick message on mirror saying: "Fresno, may God forgive you. Babies, I'm not a murderer. I love you."

Case 6

In September 2000, a young couple from Ravenna, Ohio was expecting their first child. The victim mother was age 23. They had advertised the sale of their car in the daily newspaper. Michelle Bica, age 39, responded to their ad and made arrangements to meet with the victim mother the morning of September 27 to see the vehicle. When the husband telephoned his wife around noon on that day, there was no answer. When he returned from work that afternoon, he found his wife and car missing and the front door unlocked. He contacted the police.

Police took the report and began their investigation. They found the car abandoned several blocks away. They also polygraphed the husband and cleared him of suspicion. Since the arrangement for the car sale had been made over the telephone, the police checked the phone records and identified Bica, whom they attempted to interview. Bica refused to let the police into her home saying that she had a sleeping newborn. After conferring with the FBI, the local police went to re-interview Bica because of some inconsistent statements. When they arrived at the home, they heard gunshots. They entered the residence and found the abductor's husband outside a locked bedroom door. Upon entering the bedroom, they found the abductor dead of a self-inflicted gunshot.

The remains of the victim mother were found in a shallow grave outside of the garage. An autopsy revealed that the victim mother had been shot in the back, and that her stomach had been crudely cut horizontally to deliver the baby. The police found the 8-lb. 6-

oz. newborn baby boy unharmed in a bedroom. DNA tests determined that the baby was the young couple's.

Neighbors had been notified that the Bica couple had a new baby and had attended a shower for the mother. However, they also noticed Mrs. Bica digging near the garage and saw a load of gravel being delivered. Mrs. Bica, in answer to questions about her activity so soon after having a baby, said the doctor had given permission. No one asked any additional questions despite their observations. Neighbors later said that Bica regularly asked neighbors if they heard any news about the missing 9-month pregnant woman.

Newspaper accounts of Michelle Bica's early history note that she was the eldest of two daughters. At age 13, Bica discovered her father's body, an apparent suicide from carbon monoxide, in the family garage. Ten years later she married a Middle East student at the University she was attending. A year later the couple separated and over the next five years, she lived in at least eight cities. She then settled in Ravenna but was caught embezzling money from her employer. While on probation, she was diagnosed with endometrial cystic hyperplasia, a condition that causes the uterine wall to thicken or harden. She had treatment but failed to pay the \$252.00 bill. After marrying Thomas Bica, the couple moved to within four blocks of the victim mother.

Michelle Bica met her husband in 1994. He was a county jail corrections officer and Bica was serving six months after getting caught for taking nearly \$10,000 from her employer. She received probation and a fine after pleading not guilty by reason of insanity.

Discussion

There are three major points to be made from an analysis of the six cases of newborn stealing by cesarean section: classifying the crime, a behavioral profile, and dynamics of the cesarean section fantasy.

Classifying the Crime

The six cases can be classified as to the crime committed. The Crime Classification Manual (8) includes four major categories of homicide: criminal enterprise, personal cause, sexual, and group cause. Cases 1, 4, 5, and 6 can be classified as personal cause homicide with a subtype of cesarean section homicide in which the motive is based on a need for a baby and to cement a partner relationship. In first naming this type of homicide, Yutzy, Wolfson, and Resnick (5) identify the motive in their Case 1 was to obtain an infant and emphasize that the extreme nature of the murder may initially obfuscate the purpose of the crime.

In these four cases, the cesarean section homicide included planning the disposal of the victim mother's body to be hidden under bushes, sealed in a container and thrown into a ravine, and buried in a garage. In Case 5, the offender returned to the crime scene, removed the body by cutting it into pieces and hiding it in a trash can. In these four cases, the offenders took great measures to hide or destroy evidence of the baby's biological mother.

Case 3 can be classified as personal cause, domestic homicide by cesarean section (8). This case involved multiple offenders who participated in the cesarean section, and where the mother's body (and her daughter's body) was left where killed in the home. The victim mother was an ex-partner of one of the abductors and the baby was suspected to be his. Case 2 may be classified as a criminal enterprise crime where the cesarean section was performed by a doctor and the baby given to the abductors in return for some type of material exchange.

Behavioral Profile

The behavioral profile of these six cesarean section cases suggest the majority of these abductors use a confidence style approach to the victim mother whom they have befriended, conned, or recently met. The abductors have deceived others about a pregnancy, are focused in their mission, may need an accomplice, are planning to kill the mother, and extract the newborn by cesarean section themselves (four women) with one abductor having two assistants. Deception is often a pattern with these women. Four of the six had a prior criminal record involving deception and theft. The child stealing fits with their prior behavior but the homicide by cesarean section implies the development of a detailed fantasy over obtaining the baby directly.

Although most abductors used a cutting instrument such as a knife, one woman used an ordinary set of car keys. It appears that in the five cases where the mother died, she was killed before the cesarean section either by gunshot or strangulation. Five of the six babies survived.

Dynamics of a Cesarean Section Fantasy

What are the dynamics of cesarean section homicide? There was a dual motive of the abductors. One motive was to cement a partner relationship; a second motive was to fulfill a childbearing and delivery fantasy. The female abductors, in essence, become a mother by proxy by acting out a fantasy of them delivering a baby. It becomes the way she can feel it is her baby to bond with and to insure she would be the first mother image to the baby. But, there is the reality of what to do with the biological mother. They need to dispose of the body. Case 2 is atypical in that the newborn is not delivered from the fantasy.

All abductors have a childbearing fantasy to obtain a baby, that is, the fantasy represents the elaborate planning involved in stealing a baby (1). This cesarean section fantasy differs from other cases in which violence is used because it is not just getting the baby but to assume the mothering identity to producing the baby. This part of the fantasy is the kernel of the primitive thinking. They live their deception to become a productive mother. Whatever they lack in terms of reproductivity triggers the cesarean section fantasy as opposed to abductors who wanted a baby, searched out a newborn and if the parents tried to prevent them, they were killed suggesting a different level of violence and defensiveness.

The abductors in these six cases decided to do something physical to get the baby. It appears, from their work and schooling history, they are functional until the emotional fantasy swings into motion. To use a metaphor, their identity and integrative capacity is held together by a shoestring. When the string is untied, they unravel.

Two abductors committed suicide, one before arrest and one after conviction suggesting an added dimension to the fantasy. The minute the fantasy is challenged and the abductor is confronted with the fact that the baby is not hers, for certain abductors, the suicide plan is provoked. The motherhood by proxy fantasy is a defense against underlying primitive thinking. If they carry out the fantasy of believing it is their baby, and then, confronted with guilt as in Case 5 or police investigation as in Case 6, there begins an erosion of the psychological integration of the event. Rather than face the reality that they did not produce the baby, they killed themselves.

From a diagnostic perspective, we can ask if the primitive thinking is a fantasy or does it represent, at times, a break in reality, and take on the dimensions of a psychotic delusion? In Case 1, where

there were expert witnesses on both sides of the criminal case, neither opined Darci Pierce as delusional (psychotic). Both experts diagnosed personality disorder(s). The defense expert also diagnosed both a dissociative disorder and a factitious disorder. Both of these conditions occurred with severe personality psychopathology. Thus, there is at least one case that argues against the use of delusion. The thinking is not disorganized like that of psychotic individuals, i.e., loose associations, etc., but probably more aptly described as primitive, (as in the case of cluster B personality psychopathology).

The majority of abductors did not manifest identifiable symptoms of psychosis; rather, there appears to be more organization and planning in what they do and intention of going after what they want. That the implementation of their plan varied in the skill in which it was carried out does not explain the kind of reasoning of the surgery performed. The only one that represents some kind of logic, absent intent to kill, was Case 2 where the sisters had a doctor perform a cesarean section. But then there is the opposite extreme of Case 1 where the pregnant woman was tied to a tree and a car key used in the surgery.

In summary, we wish to state a cautionary note. Our psychodynamic formulation is preliminary and based on a very small number of cases. Although a control group is not possible, there are many ways for women to deal with not being able to bear children. Most adopt children. Others suffer mental symptoms such as depression and a few develop pseudocyesis (false pregnancy). Some of these women have similar psychopathology (severe cluster B personality disorders) as noted in this sample; yet do not carry out the extreme motherhood by proxy fantasy. Otherwise, we would be creating too many false positives for this (fortunately) rare aberrant behavior.

The issue of fertility for women obsessed with stealing a baby is weighted with psychological issues, not the least of which appears to be the narcissistic blow and rage over not being able to have a baby. And their male partners may well play into it with their reproductive needs and reluctance to deal with the problems of fertility. However, the forensic evidence of the killing of the mother, extracting the newborn by cesarean section, and disposal of the mother's body points up the cognitive structure and planning that accompanies the crime. Further work is needed to identify the triggering factors so that preventative steps might be implemented.

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