

WHEN ADULTS LOSE CONTROL , BABIES DIE - FRUSTRATION, IGNORANCE TIED TO DEATHS

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Tuesday, January 24, 2006

Author: JACK KRESNAK, FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Whether smothered by a pillow, battered by fists or bound and gagged with an ace bandage, **babies** have been killed at an alarming rate in metro Detroit over the past year, according to charges filed by area prosecutors.

"We've had enough," said Nancy Diehl, chief of the felony trial division of the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office and a longtime prosecutor of child abusers. "Last year, I think we were up to 11 or so **baby** deaths. Now, of course, we've had two just since the New Year."

Although the numbers in the northern suburbs are smaller, the two **baby** homicides in Oakland County are just as tragic as those in Wayne County. Macomb County had no homicides of children younger than 2 in over a year, although a 7-week-old **baby** in Utica was severely injured apparently by being shaken in May, police say.

A common factor in many of the killings was a parent or boyfriend of the child's mother losing patience with the **baby**'s crying and hurting the child in an effort to make the wailing stop, according to authorities.

"In the end, if you really are losing your patience, you're better off to leave the **baby** for a moment or finding some help," Diehl said. "People don't have to feel that they're alone in that difficult situation."

Anger, depression

A Free Press review of several child abuse homicide charges over the past year appears to bear out Diehl's assertion that frustration and ignorance often lead to tragic consequences for children.

Take the Oct. 10 shaking death of 2-month-old Nakita Faith Lemons in her parents' apartment in Wayne.

The **baby**'s father, Milton Lee Lemons, now 32, told police that he was "very angry, depressed" **when** he shook Nakita violently to get her to stop crying. Wayne police detectives said he showed them how he shook the **baby**, demonstrating it to them with a stuffed animal at the police station.

The child's death was caused by brain swelling with bleeding behind the eyes. A small bone fracture on Nakita's right shoulder also showed that she had been shaken violently, according to a police report.

Police said Lemons told them he loved his daughter, but "she cries a lot." He also said that "he knew shaking an infant can be fatal" because he had seen it on television, according to the police

report.

Lemons was charged with first-degree murder, but hearings are delayed while he is being psychologically evaluated.

On June 6, 9-month-old Simone Cavanaugh was allegedly smothered by her mother in their Pontiac home. Shontelle Cavanaugh, who was charged with open murder, was suffering from postpartum depression, according to her lawyer, but she was found competent to stand trial. Cavanaugh is expected to be arraigned in Oakland County Circuit Court today.

Two weeks ago, on Jan. 10, 8-month-old Eryck Mark-Eugene Fossett died after a battering in his paternal grandmother's apartment in Canton Township, said prosecutors, who charged Carlee Hines Jr., 23, the boyfriend of the **baby**'s mother, Erica Rodwell, with first-degree murder.

Prosecutors said Hines admitted that "he got mad and picked Eryck up from behind and squeezed him."

Eryck died from blunt force trauma to the upper left abdomen that tore his spleen and liver and broke nine ribs.

Hines allegedly told police that he lost his temper because the **baby** was crying while he was trying to play a video game so he punched the **baby** with both fists. Hines "stated that he was just so mad because he had to put his video game on pause because Eryck kept crying," the police report said.

Asphyxiation

One of the strangest - and perhaps most cruel - recent killing of a **baby** occurred on Jan. 8 **when** 4-month-old Sivad Davis died of asphyxiation.

Detroit police homicide detectives say Deric Davis, 19, told them that he was tired of listening to his son crying that day, so he bound the **baby**'s ankles and hands with wristbands to keep him from moving and then wrapped elastic gauze bandage around his face with only his nose exposed while the infant lay in his bassinet in an overheated apartment bedroom at 1001 E. Jefferson Avenue.

Davis set a fan to blow onto the **baby**'s face then left the room to hang out in the efficiency apartment's living room-kitchen area with the **baby**'s mother, Tiffiney Bentley, for at least 90 minutes but as long as three hours, said homicide detective Lance Newman.

"Here's the weird part," Newman said. "You know how **when** you blow into a cat's face that it shakes its head because it can't breathe? Can you imagine having your hands and feet bound and your face wrapped with only your nose exposed and a fan blowing on it?"

Bentley told police that she heard her **baby** crying for "an hour or so" but did not check on him as she continued listening to music through earphones. Bentley was not charged.

Davis' lawyer said the young father didn't mean to kill his son.

"He's beside himself and raw with grief over this terrible tragedy," the attorney, David Gorosh, said. "He feels just terrible about this accident."

The Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, however, calls Sivad's death premeditated murder. Anyone with sense would know that leaving a **baby** in a stifling hot bedroom, alone in his bassinet, trussed up with only his nose exposed to breathe with a fan blowing directly on his face would cause the child to suffocate, officials said.

Davis was the victim of child abuse **when** he was a 1-year-old, according to Wayne County Family Court records that also said Davis spent years living with relatives because his mother was mentally ill and mentally retarded.

Parenting skills

Diehl, the prosecutor, said that judging from the criminal cases that "typically, in our society, a lot of men really don't have the experience of caring for a child. These mothers think they can leave their **babies** with a boyfriend who seems to be a very nice person, but they don't know how to deal with **babies** that are crying and needing attention.

"Do they teach good parenting in school?" Diehl asked. "If they are, clearly they're not teaching it enough."

Contact JACK KRESNAK at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

(SIDEBAR)

Signs of abuse

Physical Abuse

Physical indicators

- *Bite marks, missing clumps of hair

- *Unexplained bruises, welts, loop marks, burns, fractures or other wounds

Behavioral indicators

- *Self-destructive/self-mutilation

- *Withdrawn, aggressive

- *Uncomfortable with physical contact

*Late to school, stays late after school as if afraid

*Chronic runaway

*Complains of soreness, moves uncomfortably

Physical Neglect

Physical indicators

*Unattended medical needs

*Consistent lack of supervision

*Consistent hunger, inappropriate dress, poor hygiene

*Distended stomach, emaciated

Behavioral indicators

*Regularly displays fatigue, falls asleep in class

*Steals or hoards food, begs from classmates

*Frequently absent or tardy

*Reports no caretaker at home

Sexual Abuse

Physical indicators

*Pain, itching, bruising or bleeding in genital area

*Venereal disease

*Frequent urinary or yeast infection

*Massive weight change

Behavioral Indicators

*Withdrawn, depressed

*Sexual behaviors, unusual sexual references

*Seductive or promiscuous behavior

*Poor self-esteem, lack of confidence

*Hysteria, lack of emotional **control**

*Suicide attempts

*Habit disorders such as sucking or rocking

Child's Hope, the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Out-Wayne County

Jack Kresnak

(SIDEBAR)

Recent **baby** deaths in metro Detroit 2006

*Jan. 10: Eryck Mark-Eugene Fossett, 8 months old, is found dead in his grandmother's apartment in Canton Township. His mother's boyfriend, Carlee Hines Jr., 23, is charged with felony

murder after allegedly admitting to police that he had punched the infant. A preliminary examination for Hines is set for Friday in 35th District Court in Plymouth.

*Jan. 8: Sivad Davis, 4 months old, is taken to Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit after he stopped breathing. His father, Deric Davis, 19, is charged with first-degree murder; police say he admitted that he bound the **baby**'s hands and feet and wrapped an Ace bandage around his head, cutting off his air supply.

2005

*Dec. 17: The body of 9-month-old Malik O'Neal is found hidden in a cabinet in the basement of his grandmother's home in Detroit. Authorities say the boy's mother, Jessica Marie O'Neal, 21, later confessed to suffocating her son with a pillow and then hiding the body for more than a week. The case is pending because of a court-ordered psychological examination of O'Neal.

*Oct. 10: Nakita Faith Lemons,

2 1/2 months old, dies after being shaken in her parents' apartment in Wayne, authorities say. Her father, Milton Lee Lemons, 32, is charged with first-degree murder. The case is pending because of a court-ordered psychological examination of Lemons.

*Sept. 16: Vershawn White, 10 months old, dies after suffering blunt force trauma to the head and stomach. Police say the **baby**'s mother's boyfriend, Gary Love Jr., 19, admitted striking the

child to get him to stop crying and is charged with felony murder. A trial is scheduled to begin Monday.

*June 6: Simone Cavanaugh, 9 months, is allegedly smothered in her Pontiac home. Her mother, Shontelle Cavanaugh, is charged with open murder. Her lawyer says she was suffering from postpartum depression, but a psychological examination found her competent to stand trial. Cavanaugh, who was bound over for trial Jan. 12 on a charge of second-degree murder, is scheduled to be arraigned today in Oakland County Circuit Court.

*May 19: Tamyah Vaughn, 18 months, and her half-brother, Raylond McCulley, 10, are killed in a firebombing of their mother's home in Detroit. The mother's boyfriend, Kenneth Fitzgerald Nixon, 19, and 18-year-old Latoya Caulford, both of Detroit, are charged with felony murder. Their trial is pending.

*April 16: Odessa Solomon, 5 months, is suffocated in her crib by her mother's boyfriend, John Henry Whitfield, 40. Whitfield is convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to 7-15 years in

*March 2: Tyler Michael Bates, 6 months, is shaken and beaten to death, allegedly by his father, Ryan Kierzak, 21, in their Canton Township home. Kierzak allegedly became upset with the **baby**'s crying and repeatedly shook the **baby** saying, "Shut the (expletive) up or I'll shut you up," according to a police report. He is charged with felony murder. His trial is pending.

Sources: Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, area police departments

Jack Kresnak

(SIDEBAR)

Reporting suspected child abuse, neglect

Call your local county Department of Human Services. These numbers are answered 24 hours a day.

Wayne: 313-963-6006

Oakland: 248-975-5010

Macomb: 586-412-6109

Monroe: 734-243-7400

Genesee: 810-760-2222

Washtenaw: 734-481-9110

Livingston: 517-546-8668

*ALSO: How to identify signs of child abuse; recent child deaths. 7B

ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION:

Carlee Hines Jr. was charged with murder in the death of his girlfriend's son.

Deric Davis is accused of killing his 4-month-old son.

CAPTIONWRITER: Jessica O'Neal, 21, of Detroit was charged with suffocating her **baby** , Malik O'Neal.

MEMO: SIDEBARS ATTACHED

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Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS; NEWS

Page: 1B

Index Terms: child abuse; namelist; death; telephone; list;sex abuse; symptom

Record Number: dfp0000224525

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