

# From desperate to psychotic: What makes some women kill for a baby

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Saturday, August 1st 2009, 4:00 AM

The [Massachusetts](#) woman arrested Wednesday in connection with the gruesome murder of a mom whose fetus was cut from her womb could have been so desperate for a child that she became psychotic, experts say.

“To do something like this is a sign of being very desperate,” says psychiatrist [Dr. Maria Padro](#), a clinical assistant professor at [New York Medical College](#). “This is very extreme and very uncommon. A woman with better coping skills who really desires a baby and can’t have one usually goes to a clinic for help, or else she adopts. But some women in their desperation for a baby have an anti-social streak and they are capable of committing murder to get a baby.”

But the motive for committing such a grisly crime goes beyond just the desire for a baby, says [Dr. Charles Ewing](#), forensic psychologist and professor of law at the State [University at Buffalo](#). “The people who commit these killings are looking for more than a baby,” he says. “If they wanted a baby, they could kidnap one, since that is much easier. But these killings have an almost psychotic quality to them. They are ripping a woman open, removing a fetus and taking off with it. These people are so disturbed that they see this as an easy route to get a newborn.”

He says that the crime is so rare that there’s little research on it that would indicate a behavior pattern, but notes that several cases have occurred in recent years.

In one case, a medical condition, pseudocyesis, was used by a defense expert. Pseudocyesis, sometimes called just “false pregnancy,” occurs when a woman believes she is pregnant and even develops the physical symptoms of pregnancy. The condition was discussed in a 2004 [Missouri](#) case involving a 39-year-old woman charged with strangling her victim, cutting the baby from her stomach and passing off the baby as her own.

Defense witness [Dr. Vilayanur Ramachandran](#), director of the [Center of Brain and Cognition](#) at the [University of California in San Diego](#), testified that [Lisa Montgomery](#) suffered delusions tied to pseudocyesis, which he called “a severe mental disease,” according to the [Kansas City Star](#). Montgomery was convicted and sentenced to death, according to the St. Joseph News-Press in Missouri.

In another recent case, a 23-year-old [Washington](#) state woman was accused of fatally stabbing a pregnant woman, cutting the fetus from the womb, and attempting to pass off the infant as her own, according to the [Houston Chronicle](#).

But typically pseudocyesis, or pseudopregnancy, does not result in murder, says Padro. Sufferers often don’t stop believing they are pregnant even after being told by a physician that they’re not, and may even be convinced after nine months that they are about to go into labor.

“Usually the condition occurs later in life, in the 30s and 40s, when a woman is really desperate for a baby,” Padro says. “But it would be unlikely for a woman with pseudocyesis to murder another woman and cut out her baby. This crime is extreme and premeditated. A person capable of killing someone else in such a gruesome way must really plan it. And if she is faking a pregnancy with her friends, she really had to plan ahead.”