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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section

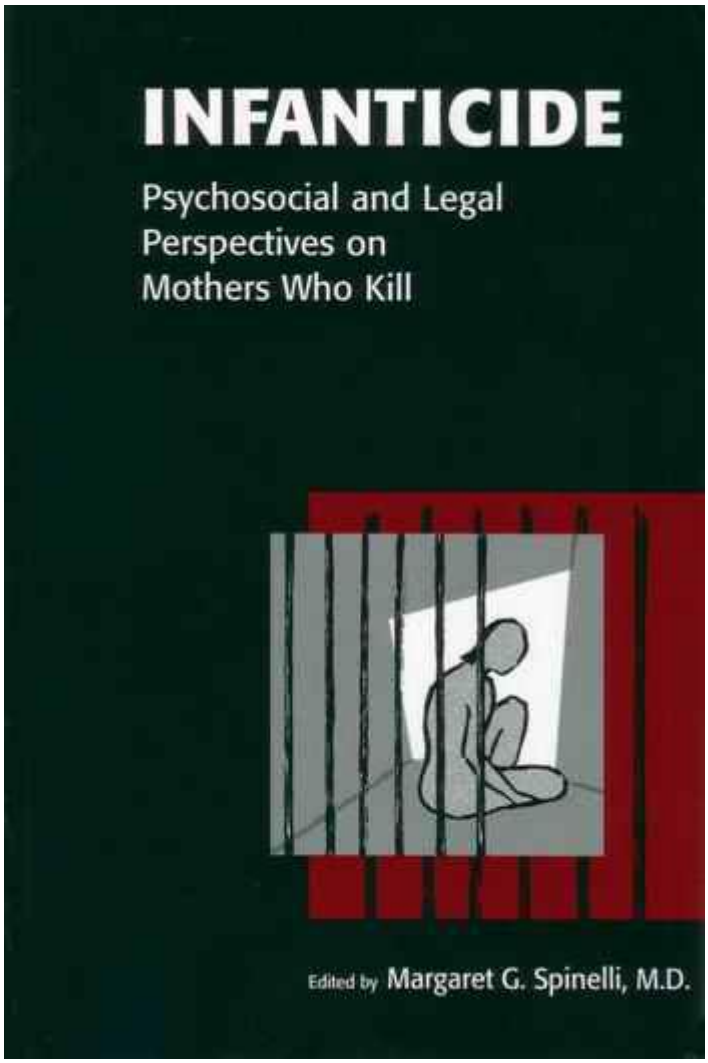
...AN EXCELLENT ADDITION TO LITERATURE ON INFANTICIDE ...This book won the 2004 Manfred S. Guttmacher Award too. I would highly recommend it to all. As for me, I am going to keep this book with me, because as a forensic pathologist, I have to deal with infanticide cases almost on a daily basis, and now I know where to fall back upon, when I am stuck... Rating : 10/10...

Infanticide: Psychosocial and Legal Perspectives on Mothers Who Kill, 1st Edition, edited by Margaret G. Spinelli. Hard Bound, 9.2" x 6.1" x 1".
American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc., 1000 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 1825, Arlington, VA 22209-3901, USA. | | appi@psych.org. Publication Date 2003. 272 pages, ISBN-10: 1585620971, ISBN-13: 978-1585620975. Price $68.00

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Infanticide is traditionally defined as the murder of an infant within the first year of its life. Maternal infanticide is a special subclass of this category, where the child is killed by its own mother. Not unsurprisingly the issue elicits sorrow, anger, horror, and outrage. But few realize that quite a number of times, the killer is often a victim, too.

In many countries it is now recognized that in the immediate postpartum period some mothers may suffer from postpartum psychosis and may kill their infants under the effects of psychosis. Many countries now treat such mothers lightly, but many others - India is one notable example - treat these mothers as an ordinary killer.

While the legislature is generally slow to wake up to new medical findings, judiciary has often been aware of such developments and have been urging the legislature to change laws relating to maternal infanticide. In one 1937 Indian case, where one Sunderbai, a Hindu widow, 22 years of age, killed her infant under the effects of postpartum psychosis, the judiciary had no choice but to hold her guilty. The Honorable judges of the Bombay High Court however pointed out that the law should be changed so that infanticide be regarded as distinct from ordinary murder, especially when an infant was killed by the mother, while she was still under the effect of child birth so that the balance of her mind was disturbed (Lahore High Court, Cri App no. 719 of 1937, *Mt Talian v KE* 39 Cri LJ, Sept 1938).

Obviously any effort to collect, compile and synthesize literature on such a burning issue is the need of the hour. The editor of this revealing work asks us to reach beyond rage, stretch the limits

of compassion, and enter the minds of mothers who kill their babies-with the hope that advancing the knowledge base and stimulating inquiry in this neglected area of maternal-infant research will save young lives.

...Material on this subject (infanticide) is very rare. Thus this book admirably serves to fill up the gap of up-to-date, research-based literature. This unique volume brings together a multidisciplinary group of 17 experts-scholars, clinicians, researchers, clinical and forensic psychiatrists, pediatric psychoanalysts, attorneys, and an epidemiologist- who focus on the psychiatric perspective of this tragic cause of infant death...

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This book is quite well organized, and has been divided into four parts. Part I presents historical and epidemiological data, including a compelling discussion of the contrasting legal views of infanticide in the United States, United Kingdom, and other Western countries, a review of the latest statistics on maternal infanticide, and a discussion of the problems of underreporting and the lack of available documentation.

Part II covers the psychiatric, psychological, cultural, and biological underpinnings of infanticide, detailing how to identify, evaluate, and treat postpartum psychiatric disorders. The authors explore clinical diagnosis, symptom recognition, risk factors, biological precipitants, and alternative motives, such as cultural infanticide. Chapter 3, developed to assist the attorney or mental health professional in understanding the implications of postpartum psychiatric illness as they relate to infanticide, presents a sensitive and thorough inquiry into infanticidal ideation.

Part III focuses on contemporary legislation, criminal defenses, and disparate treatment in U.S. law and compares U.S. law with the U.K.'s model of probation and treatment. Chapter 8 is an especially useful resource for the attorney or expert psychiatric witness preparing for an infanticide/ neonaticide case in the criminal court system.

Part IV discusses clinical experience with mothers as perpetrators and counter transference in therapy, the range of mother-infant interactions (from healthy to pathological), and methods of early intervention and prevention.

...This book won the 2004 Manfred S. Guttmacher Award too. This excellent work should be a valuable tool for psychiatric and medical professionals (child, clinical, and forensic psychiatrists and psychologists; social workers; obstetricians/gynecologists and midwives; nurses; and pediatricians), legal professionals (judges, attorneys, law students), public health professionals, and interested laypersons...

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