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**Matricide: primal aggression in search of self-affirmation.**

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**ABSTRACT**

Three major theories of matricide are presented and critiqued using epidemiological data, case studies, and descriptive research. The strengths and weaknesses of psychoanalytic theory, family systems theory, and cognitive behaviorism in explaining matricide are described. The social-interaction theory of violence and, in particular, self-affirmation motive is presented as the most helpful perspective for understanding murder of the mother. This review covers those concepts within psychoanalysis, cognitive behaviorism, and family systems theory that have historically been used to understand matricide and is not a critique of modern psychoanalysis, cognitive behaviorism or family systems theory. Matricide occurs in less than 1% of all homicides. Offenders are heterogeneous in their characteristics with at least three different types. Most prominent characteristics across matricide types are severe mental illness, a domineering mother, a hostile-dependent relationship with the mother, a passive or withdrawn father, and over kill behavior. Self-affirmation motive suggests several interventions to prevent violence against the mother or its equivalents. The author makes several conclusions about the nature of human aggression and family dysfunction.