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Author Says Control Issues Drive Men to Kill Spouses – Special Report

By Laura Crimaldi

Batterers who use lethal force against their partners are engaged in a losing game of control that pushes them to kill because otherwise they have no chance of getting their partner to submit, according to a veteran psychologist.

David Adams, co-founder and co-director of Cambridge-based Emerge, a batterer's program, is the author of "Why Do They Kill? Men Who Murder Their Intimate Partners," to be published this month by Vanderbilt University Press.

In the book, Adams identifies five types of lethal batterers: the jealous partner, the suicidal partner, the career criminal, the substance abuser and the materially motivated partner.

Adams interviewed 31 men who killed their female partners as well as women who were nearly killed by their batterers.

He said the men who resorted to fatal force were "possessive," "more controlling" and tended to come from households where they witnessed abusive fathers beat their mothers. At some point in their lives, the men decided to mold their behavior after their father's behavior, he said.

"For many of the killers that I interviewed, some of them said that they had in effect lost – that they had lost a relationship, lost the partner that they only fought to control and the only thing left was to kill," Adams said. "It was the ultimate act of control, but also an ultimate act of defeat."

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